

Making the Case for a Sociocultural Perspective on Information Literacy

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Since the first early drafts of the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Framework)*,¹ librarians have pored over and subjected virtually every inch of this document to microscopic scrutiny. Praised for its flexibility yet critiqued for its simultaneous over- and under-theorization,² amongst other issues, the only aspect of the *Framework* that has escaped this depth of analysis is the new definition of information literacy that was released quietly and concurrently as part of the *Framework* package. This lack of critical attention could be linked to the idea that in centering on the discovery, the value, and the use of information, the new definition remains essentially unchanged from the one that has been in use since 1989/2000³ (see Table 1 for a comparison). It could also be connected to the assumption that information literacy forms an immutable concept, or an idea that is so straightforward or obvious that it does not need further examination. Alternatively, in failing to engage with literature that explores the nature of information literacy through a sociocultural perspective, this oversight

1 Association of College & Research Libraries, *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, adopted January 11, 2016, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>.

2 Christine Bombaro, "The Framework Is Elitist," *Reference Services Review* 44, no. 4 (2016): 552–63, doi:10.1108/RSR-08-2016-0052; Patrick Morgan, "Pausing at the Threshold," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 15, no. 1 (2015): 183–95, doi:10.1353/pla.2015.0002.

3 Association of College & Research Libraries, *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, approved January 18, 2000, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/standards/standards.pdf>.

could also represent a significant missed opportunity for the development of information literacy theory and practice.

This chapter is structured around my claim that while the *Framework*, as well as the push towards increasingly critical implementations of information literacy have contributed to the development of more complex instructional pedagogies,⁴ this overwhelming focus on teaching means that librarians have lost sight of what information literacy is or could be within communities today. Recognizing that this emphasis limits the scope of librarian teaching and learning contributions within complex information landscapes, I contend that it is by taking a step back from the classroom and engaging with sociocultural theory that is developed in practice that librarians can contribute to the design of more meaningful educational opportunities. In other words, rather than seeing theory as unrelated to or as judging practice, I argue that in emerging from everyday settings and in conjunction with social activity, theory and practice are both intricately entwined as well as mutually constitutive. In this light, I use this chapter to argue that firstly, the adoption of a sociocultural perspective on information literacy establishes and facilitates a more inclusive and holistic approach for exploring the connections between people and information, and secondly, that interest in sociocultural learning theories has not yet always translated to an understanding of its implications for the nature and scope of information literacy.

The chapter will start by providing an overview of sociocultural approaches to information literacy before exploring how the adoption of this perspective can broaden and deepen our understanding of information literacy and, consequently, librarian contributions to student learning. It continues by exploring how the problematization of information literacy facilitates greater alignment with the changing purpose and nature of higher education as well as a more meaningful exploration of the interactions between information, the embodied learner, and their material environment. The chapter finishes by examining how sociocultural approaches to information literacy can help to mediate ongoing tensions between the theory and practice of information literacy today.

Sociocultural Theory + Information Literacy

What is a sociocultural perspective on information literacy? Most simply, the use of a sociocultural lens emphasizes that people use information for different purposes in their lives, or that information literacy looks

⁴ Maria Accardi, Emily Drabinski, and Alana Kumbier, eds., *Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods* (Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press 2010).

distinctive for different people, at different times, and within different contexts.⁵ In other words, a sociocultural perspective centers upon communities and how information literacy “shows itself” in the different collective practices and activities of each group rather than trying to fit a group’s information actions and understandings to a previously established model of information literacy.⁶ Drawing from theories of learning as well as from research in the field of literacy and workplace studies, amongst other areas, these ideas position both information and the ideas of competence and literacy as contextual and collective, or as emerging from and shaped in relation to a community’s situated experiences.⁷ In effect, and as Street points out, a sociocultural model *explores* the social nature and implications of information literacy rather than assuming that its positive consequences are a given, and all that remains to be addressed is how it is to be “imparted.”⁸

Seen in this light, a sociocultural perspective has considerable implications for the way that we think about information literacy as well as for how we teach it. As Papen points out regarding the use of literacy metaphors, the adoption of a specific theory is “part of a particular view on literacy that has implications for how we think about learners, how we think about what they ought to learn and how this could be achieved.”⁹ In other words, the idea that a community forms the site that produces information literacy development, rather than merely providing the contextualizing background, has a corresponding effect on what information literacy looks and feels like. Drawing upon these notions, sociocultural ideas have led to new attempts to define information literacy in less rigid terms, including as a “way of knowing,”¹⁰ as a form of communication “in relation to the information used in the research practice,”¹¹ and as an interaction between “people, artefacts and

5 Anna Lundh and Jenny Lindberg, “Information Literacies: Concepts, Contexts and Cultural Tools,” *Human IT: Journal for Information Technology Studies as a Human Science* 11, no. 2 (2012): 157, <http://etjanst.hb.se/bhs/ich/2-11/ahljl.pdf>.

6 Benjamin Harris, “Communities as Necessity in Information Literacy Development: Challenging the Standards,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 34, no. 3 (2008): 250, doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2008.03.008.

7 Louise Limberg, Olof Sundin, and Sanna Talja, “Three Theoretical Perspectives on Information Literacy,” *Human IT: Journal for Information Technology Studies as a Human Science* 11, no. 2 (2012): 93–130, <https://humanit.hb.se/article/view/69>.

8 Brian Street, “Literacy and Social Change: The Significance of Social Context in the Development of Literacy Programmes,” *The Future of Literacy in a Changing World*, ed. Daniel Wagner, (New York, NY: Pergamon, 1987), 56.

9 Uta Papen, *Adult Literacy as Social Practice: More than Skills* (London: Routledge 2005), 12.

10 Annemaree Lloyd, *Information Literacy Landscapes: Information Literacy in Education, Workplace and Everyday Contexts* (Oxford: Chandos, 2010).

11 Ola Pilerot, “A Practice-Based Exploration of the Enactment of Information Literacy among PhD Students in an Interdisciplinary Research Field,” *Journal of Documentation* 72, no. 3 (2016): 414–34, doi:10.1108/JD-05-2015-0056.

policies.”¹² These ideas help us to recognize that information work may look very different when it is explored ethnographically rather than measured in relation to pre-established models.

For some practitioners and scholars, the move from the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (Standards)* to the *Framework* does, in fact constitute the adoption of a sociocultural perspective on information literacy.¹³ For Foasberg, for example, it is by virtue of moving from an enumerated list of competencies to a more “conceptual approach” that the *Framework* can be seen as employing a sociocultural perspective, while she further sees the Scholarship as Conversation and the Authority is Constructed and Contextual frames as emphasizing the disciplinary or social and community based nature of information literacy.¹⁴ The prominence of disciplinary context within the introductory preamble to the *Framework* as well as the addition of “communities of learning” to the 2016 definition of information literacy (see Table 1), which is a clear reference to Wenger’s socioculturally situated work on Communities of Practice,¹⁵ could be seen as providing further evidence that the *Framework* embraces a sociocultural philosophy.

1989/2000 Definition	2015 Definition
Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to	Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities
locate,	encompassing the reflective discovery of information
evaluate,	the understanding of how information is produced and valued
and use effectively the needed information”	and the use of information in creating new knowledge
	and participating ethically in communities of learning

Table 1. Comparison of ACRL Definitions of Information Literacy

12 Olof Sundin and Hanna Carlsson, “Outsourcing Trust to the Information Infrastructure in Schools; How Search Engines Order Knowledge in Education Practices,” *Journal of Documentation* 72, no. 6 (2016): 994, doi:10.1108/JD-12-2015-0148.

13 Association of College and Research Libraries, *Information Literacy Competency Standards*.

14 Nancy Foasberg, “From Standards to Frameworks for IL: How the ACRL Framework Addresses Critiques of the Standards,” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 15, no. 4 (2015): 702, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/595062/summary>.

15 Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Yet, while recognizing the laudable intent of the *Framework*, it is by simultaneously using threshold concept theory to codify the “foundational” and “essential” truths of information literacy that the *Framework* negates its own newly discovered claims to subject-based or community knowing.¹⁶ In effect, by aligning information literacy with an educational theory that explicitly aims to identify the core and bounded concepts that constitute a field of study,¹⁷ or “*the ways of thinking and practicing*” (my italics) within a research area,¹⁸ the *Framework*’s architects have positioned all disciplinary thinking as emerging from the same core and overarching information literacy concepts rather than, as is the case with a sociocultural perspective, recognizing the individuality and uniqueness of each discipline. In effect, these ideas return us full circle to the idea that information literacy forms a decontextualized and generic skill rather than constituting a disciplinary or sociocultural practice that emerges from and connects to the varying different experiences and values of a collective. A threshold must always be an entry to somewhere and dispositions can only be relevant in the practice of which they form a part.¹⁹ However, in attempting to define the generic or fundamental concepts of information literacy, the *Framework* removes the very context that produces this gateway in the first place. The same challenge to sociocultural ideas can also be seen through the *Framework*’s inclusion of knowledge practices, which position knowledge as stable and as agreed upon rather than as contested and emergent, as is the case in the sociocultural perspective.²⁰ In effect, threshold concept theory does not contribute to the development of disciplinary information literacy, or to the production of course and subject based educational strategies. Instead, it positions information literacy as its own discipline, which, in producing an overarching model of what an information literate person looks like,²¹ fur-

16 Association of College and Research Libraries, *Framework for Information Literacy*, 2015, accessed Dec 1, 2016, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>.

17 Jan Meyer and Ray Land, “Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising Within the Disciplines,” *ETL Project Occasional Report 4*, 2003: 4–5, <http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/ETLreport4.pdf>.

18 Lori Townsend, Korey Brunetti, and Amy R. Hofer, “Threshold Concepts and Information Literacy,” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 11, no. 3 (2011): 854, doi:10.1353/pla.2011.0030.

19 Stephen Kemmis, Jane Wilkinson, Christine Edwards-Groves, Ian Hardy, Peter Grootenboer and Laurette Bristol, *Changing Practices, Changing Education* (Singapore: Springer Science + Business Media, 2014), 60.

20 Alison Hicks and Annemaree Lloyd, “It Takes a Community to Build a Framework: Information Literacy within Intercultural Settings,” *Journal of Information Science* 42, no. 3 (2016): 334–43, doi:10.1177/0165551516630219.

21 Sheila Webber and Bill Johnston, “Information Literacy: Conceptions, Context and the Formation of a Discipline,” *Journal of Information Literacy* 11, no. 1 (2017): 156–83, doi:10.11645/11.1.2205.

ther clashes with the sociocultural idea that information literacy is shaped and understood through its context.

Having established what a sociocultural perspective does and does not look like, the chapter will now explore what specific effects these ideas have upon our understandings of information literacy.

Problematizing Information Literacy

Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the most important ways in which a sociocultural perspective contributes to the field is through the problematizing of information literacy, particularly beyond its traditional academic underpinnings. More specifically, if information literacy is understood as a social practice that emerges from a community's information interactions, a sociocultural perspective helps us to question and explore the values and assumptions that are being obscured when we define information literacy in homogenous or uniform terms. Too often, as Boon, Johnston and Webber point out, it has been "librarians' conceptions and experiences that have dominated ...information literacy."²² While the *Framework*, which was based upon findings from a Delphi study that was conducted with librarians,²³ and Bruce's *Seven Faces of Information Literacy*,²⁴ which employed a phenomenographic approach to interview information professionals, for example, have emerged out of very different research traditions, it is the conclusions of expert information workers that have driven the field to date. This heritage can be seen most clearly within what has been labelled typical "fairy-tale" information literacy models, which have a clear beginning, middle, and end and are inclined to echo "the pattern of many information professionals' interactions with their clients...beginning with defining a query, proceeding through purposive searching and concluding with the client supplied with 'information.'"²⁵ Beyond the focus on librarian perspectives, I would argue that it is the scholarly publishing models of university teaching faculty that have further dominated the field: while information literacy is often positioned as playing a vital role within "personal, social, occupational and educational

22 Stuart Boon, Bill Johnston, and Sheila Webber, "A Phenomenographic Study of English Faculty's Conceptions of Information Literacy," *Journal of Documentation* 63, no. 2 (2007): 205, doi:10.1108/00220410710737187.

23 Lori Townsend, Amy Hofer, Silvia Lin Hanick, and Corey Brunetti, "Identifying Threshold Concepts for Information Literacy. A Delphi Study," *Communications in Information Literacy* 10, no. 1 (2016): 23–49, <http://www.comminfolit.org/index.php?journal=cil&page=article&op=view&path%5B%5D=v10i1p23>.

24 Christine Bruce, *The Seven Faces of Information Literacy* (Adelaide: Auslib Press, 1997).

25 Michael Olsson, "All the World's a Stage: The Information Practices and Sense-Making of Theatre Professionals," *Libri* 60, no. 3 (2010): 243, doi:10.1515/libr.2010.021.

goals,”²⁶ it is the professional academic’s research and communication behavior that is frequently mirrored and idealized within a traditional conception of information literacy.

The importance of disciplinary research practices to both undergraduate and graduate education means that an academic definition may, in fact, be the most appropriate for the scholarly settings that provide the context for most information literacy interventions. However, and as Olsson goes on to point out, “while such models might effectively represent the information professionals’ view, are they equally effective at representing other people’s sense-making processes?”²⁷ In other words, when we assume that there is a single understanding of information literacy, we can be seen as simply imposing the understandings of specific group onto others. These ideas risk neglecting the “richness and variety”²⁸ of information literacy practices by denying cultural and linguistic diversity,²⁹ and a full consideration of the meaningful information activities that structure social practice, as Lloyd’s study of firefighters,³⁰ and Veinot’s work with vault inspectors demonstrate.³¹ The focus on academic communication also raises a number of important questions about the concepts of transfer and lifelong learning, or whether an information literacy model that arises from the bibliographic habits of librarians and scholars can meet a learner’s future civic, leisure, and workplace information needs.

From Internships to Study Abroad via Service Learning

In recognizing that academia often enforces a specific version of information literacy upon learners, a sociocultural perspective enables us to widen the lens of what we recognize as constituting information literacy practices and to address the growth in non-traditional learning opportunities within higher education. In contrast to information literacy research, most sociocultural studies to date have centered upon nontraditionally academic topics, such

26 International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, *Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning*, adopted November 9, 2005, last modified August 11, 2008, <http://www.webcitation.org/68gfMAeC1>.

27 Olsson, “All the World’s a Stage,” 243.

28 Brian Street, “The New Literacy Studies,” *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*, eds. Ellen Cushman, Eugene Kintgen, Barry Kroll, and Mike Rose (Boston, MA: St Martin’s Press 2001), 430.

29 Alison Hicks, “Reframing Librarian Approaches to International Student Information Literacy through the Lens of New Literacy Studies,” *Critical Literacy for Information Professionals*, ed. Sarah McNicol (London: Facet Publishing, 2016), 43–56.

30 Lloyd, *Information Literacy Landscapes*.

31 Tiffany Veinot, “The Eyes of the Power Company”: Workplace Information Practices of a Vault Inspector,” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Communication, Policy* 77, no. 2 (2007): 157–79, doi:10.1086/517842.

as the workplace, schools, health, and refugees.³² Given this focus on what has been termed “after-college” issues,³³ it may seem that a sociocultural perspective could contribute very little to the idea of academic information literacy. Yet, while acknowledging Deitering’s caution that learning to navigate the value and assumption-laden nature of higher education is often challenging enough in itself,³⁴ changing pedagogical models and approaches mean that an increasing number of students are already engaging with very different conceptions of information work in college. High-impact educational practices such as service-learning, study-abroad, and internship programs,³⁵ for example, represent valuable opportunities for students to engage with the everyday meanings and uses of information literacy and community-based information practices. Ongoing critique of the research paper provides further evidence of engagement with information that goes beyond a scholar’s typical research and writing practices.³⁶ And, while some may criticize these developments for naturalizing an instrumental or an anti-intellectual vision of education,³⁷ the focus on broader social issues can also be understood as reframing the rich, everyday practices or the “funds of knowledge”³⁸ that students bring to the classroom as tools for critical social thought.³⁹

32 Lloyd, *Information Literacy Landscapes*; Mikael Alexandersson and Louise Limberg, “Changing Conditions for Information Use and Learning in Swedish Schools,” *Human IT: Journal for Information Technology Studies as a Human Science* 11, no. 2 (2012): 131–54, <https://humanit.hb.se/article/view/70>; Anna Lundh, Helena Francke, and Olof Sundin, “To Assess and be Assessed: Upper Secondary School Students’ Narratives of Credibility Judgements,” *Journal of Documentation* 71, no. 1 (2015): 80–95, doi:10.1108/JD-03-2013-0035; Johanna Rivano Eckerdal, “To Jointly Negotiate a Personal Decision: A Qualitative Study on Information Literacy Practices in Midwifery Counselling about Contraceptives at Youth Centres in Southern Sweden,” *Information Research* 16, no. 1 (2011), <http://www.informationr.net/ir/16-1/paper466.html>; Annemaree Lloyd, Mary-Anne Kennan, Kim Thompson, and Asim Qayyum, “Connecting with New Information Landscapes: Information Literacy Practices of Refugees,” *Journal of Documentation* 69, no. 1 (2013): 121–44, doi:10.1108/00220411311295351.

33 Anne-Marie Deitering, “Culture is What People Do,” *info-fetishist*, April 10, 2015, <https://info-fetishist.org/2015/04/10/culture-is-what-people-do/>.

34 Deitering, “Culture is What People Do.”

35 George Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008).

36 Alison Hicks and Adrian Howkins, “Tipping the Iceberg: A Collaborative Librarian-Historian Approach to Redesigning the Undergraduate Research Assignment,” *The History Teacher* 48, no. 2 (2015): 339–70, http://scholar.colorado.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1034&context=libr_facpapers.

37 David Webster, “Reflections on the Use of ‘Real World’ in Education...from e-learn16,” *Fruits of the Pedagogic Life*, November 15, 2016, <https://davewebster.org/2016/11/15/reflections-on-the-use-of-real-world-in-education-responding-to-e-learn16/>.

38 Luis Moll and Norma González, “Lessons from Research with Language-Minority Children,” *Journal of Reading Behavior* 26, no. 4 (1994): 439–56, doi:10.1080/10862969409547862.

39 Kris Gutiérrez, “Developing a Sociocritical Literacy in the Third Space,” *Reading Research Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (2008): 148–64, doi:10.1598/RRQ.43.2.3.

An engagement with descriptions of information literacy from non-academic contexts may also help us to look more carefully at what we already teach; a sociocultural lens should not just be limited to the creation of innovative teaching pedagogies. In highlighting how coffee drinking, for example, forms an important information literacy activity for interdisciplinary Ph.D. students, Pilerot, whose research forms one of the few sociocultural studies that focuses on an academic setting, demonstrates that a sociocultural perspective facilitates a number of useful reflections on academic information literacy, including how it is enacted within a specific setting.⁴⁰ The value of the sociocultural approach can also be seen through Pilerot's descriptions of interdisciplinary information literacy practices. While the wish to counteract the critiques of the decontextualized *Standards*,⁴¹ as well as, perhaps, the importance of subject librarian structures in many academic libraries,⁴² means that disciplinary information literacy is now perceived to be baked into the *Framework's* very organization nature, Pilerot's sociocultural approach helps us to explore both the increasing fluidity between disciplines as well as to question the validity and worth of neat, disciplinary partitions and models. Lastly, and most importantly, Pilerot's work demonstrates that the use of a sociocultural lens is not just limited to research within intercultural settings. While scholarship that focuses on the information practices of international students, for example, has found that sociocultural ideas are a good fit for thinking about different ways of knowing,⁴³ Pilerot's work with design students shows that these ideas are applicable to all contexts and settings.

Hidden Dimensions

In helping us to explore what constitutes information literacy within a specific context, a sociocultural perspective further focuses our attention upon the hidden or unexpected dimensions of practice, or upon ideas that have not always been recognized within traditional models of academic information literacy yet which have the potential to add considerable depth to our teaching and learning activities. The understanding that information literacy is constituted by a community's practices means that the sociocultural approach highlights the importance of recognizing collaborative and shared information activities. These ideas move the focus of information

40 Pilerot, "A Practice-Based Exploration."

41 Association of College & Research Libraries, *Information Literacy Competency Standards*, 2000, accessed Dec 1, 2016, www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/standards.pdf.

42 Janice Jaguszewski and Karen Williams, *Transforming Liaison Roles in Research Libraries: New Roles for New Times* (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2013).

43 Hicks, "Reframing Librarian Approaches."

literacy from individual experience to experience in concert with others or the idea that information literacy emerges from and is shared through relationships and social practices like storytelling,⁴⁴ or the aforementioned coffee drinking.⁴⁵ A sociocultural perspective further demonstrates the importance of embodied practices to information literacy by highlighting how an awareness of one's own body as well as the bodies of others is key to the development of knowing within a setting.⁴⁶ Visual information, for example, often drives refugees' understanding of their setting when language is limited,⁴⁷ while the smell and feel of a patient is seen to play a vital role within health information literacy work.⁴⁸ Together with research that explores information literacy from a sociomaterial perspective, or through the interactions between people and objects,⁴⁹ a sociocultural perspective helps to build a far richer interpretation of information literacy.

A sociocultural perspective also helps to strengthen information literacy research and practice by connecting it with a broad range of social theories. Focusing our attention on what people do with literacy in everyday situations rather than on skills or abilities, New Literacy Study theory,⁵⁰ for example, alerts us to the idea of privileged and marginalized literacy practices as well as to the need to broaden conceptions of literacy that go beyond basic information skills and structures. In addition, by demonstrating how learning within higher education has often simplistically focused on either fixing or socializing learners, the Academic Literacies model, which developed from New Literacy Studies,⁵¹ helps us to interrogate the ways in which we support the development of student research practices.⁵² Similarly, in centering upon how human activity organizes and reproduces every day or routine

44 Lloyd, *Information Literacy Landscapes*.

45 Pilerot, "A Practice-Based Exploration."

46 Lloyd, *Information Literacy Landscapes*.

47 Lloyd, Kennan, Thompson, and Qayyum, "Connecting with New Information Landscapes."

48 Ann Bonner and Annemaree Lloyd, "What Information Counts at the Moment of Practice? Information Practices of Renal Nurses," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 67, no. 6 (2011): 1213–1221, doi:10.1111/j.1365-2648.2011.05613.x.

49 Sundin and Carlsson, "Outsourcing Trust to the Information Infrastructure in Schools"; Pilerot, "A Practice-Based Exploration."

50 Street, "The New Literacy Studies."

51 Mary Lea and Brian Street, "The 'Academic Literacies' Model: Theory and Applications," *Theory into Practice* 45, no. 4 (2006): 368–77, doi:10.1207/s15430421tip4504_11.

52 Alison Hicks, "Student Perspectives: Redesigning a Research Assignment Handout through the Academic Literacies Model," *Journal of Information Literacy* 10, no. 1 (2016): 30–43, doi:10.11645/10.1.2049; Karen Nicholson, "Information Literacy as a Situated Practice in the Neoliberal University," *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of CAIS* (2014), <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/ojs-cais-acsi.ca/index.php/cais-acsi/article/view/864>.

social life, practice theory moves our attention away from a typical Library and Information Science (LIS) focus on active and directed problem-solving or the idea that individuals who engage in information work must always be suffering from a lack of information.⁵³ Framing information literacy as a scaffold or as the means through which learners can connect to the legitimized ways of knowing within their information landscape,⁵⁴ practice theory provides a broad and dynamic lens through which to explore how information literacy is negotiated and shaped within a specific setting as well as how individuals make meaning within their information landscapes. These theories extend our work both by serving as a frame through which information literacy can be interpreted as well as by linking us to broader discursive formations and the fields that are dealing with many of the same issues that are found within information literacy education.

Moving Beyond the Divide

Lastly, but most importantly, a sociocultural perspective broadens professional discourse in the field. Recently, differences of opinion between the proponents of the *Framework* and defendants of the *Standards* have led to the development of an increasingly “divisive” dichotomy in the field of information literacy,⁵⁵ interpreted as being either for or against the *Framework*.⁵⁶ Yet, as this chapter has shown, there are many more ways to think about information literacy beyond these two approaches. And, while the debate between the *Framework* and the *Standards* has been credited with revitalizing the field,⁵⁷ the expansion of educational perspectives

53 Sally Irvine-Smith, “Information through the Lens: Information Research and the Dynamics of Practice,” *Information Research* 22, no. 1 (2017), <http://www.informationr.net/ir/22-1/colis/colis1603.html>.

54 Lloyd, *Information Literacy Landscapes*.

55 Bombaro, “The Framework is Elitist,” 553.

56 See the following blogposts for examples of discussions about whether to adopt the Framework or not, as well as an indication of the antagonistic tone of the conversation: Jacob Berg, “Scholarship as Conversation: The Response to the Framework for Information Literacy,” *ACRLog*, January 21, 2015, <http://acrlog.org/2015/01/21/scholarship-as-conversation-the-response-to-the-framework-for-information-literacy/>; Daniel Ransom, “Climbing off the Fence: Threshold Concepts for Information Literacy,” *The Pinakes*, September 30, 2014, <http://thepinakes.com/2014/09/climbing-off-the-fence-the-threshold-concepts-for-information-literacy/>; Kevin Klipfel, “What I Think of this Whole Annoying IL Framework/Threshold Concepts Debate,” *Rule Number One: A Library Blog*, January 27, 2014, <https://rulenumoneblog.com/2015/01/27/what-i-think-of-this-whole-annoying-il-frameworkthreshold-concepts-debate/>; Meredith Farkas, “Is the Framework Elitist? Is ACRL?” *Information Wants to be Free*, October 15, 2015, <http://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/2016/10/18/is-the-framework-elitist-is-acrl/>.

57 Meredith Farkas, “Getting into the Gray Areas with the Draft Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education,” *Information Wants to be Free*, March 3, 2014, <http://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/2014/03/03/getting-into-the-gray-areas-with-the-draft-framework-for-information-literacy-for-higher-education/>.

can only help to decenter these tensions and divisions. Most importantly, sociocultural theory can help to address key and pressing issues within the field of information literacy. While some librarians may perceive that theory has little place within the practical field of librarianship,⁵⁸ the sociocultural focus on everyday life centers our attention upon the design and construction of meaningful educational contexts with the goal of improving learning within today's complex information landscapes, rather than merely trying to overcomplicate and confuse issues.

Based upon ideas of critical theory, critical information literacy is one approach that has already contributed to the expansion of research and practice within librarianship. However, in moving the focus of information literacy beyond traditional models of formal education, a sociocultural perspective espouses many of the same questions of power that emerge from critical theory while taking "the opportunity to realize the diverse expressions of literacy at the center of its emancipatory project."⁵⁹ In other words, while a sociocultural perspective does not exclude many of the issues that have driven the development of critical information literacy to date, its focus on situated practice challenges the status quo in a number of different ways. Unlike with critical perspectives of information literacy, however, which have predominantly emerged from the classroom via the application of critical and feminist pedagogy, amongst others,⁶⁰ sociocultural perspectives of information literacy have been almost uniquely driven by the (albeit empirical) considerations of scholars and there have only been a handful of studies that look at these ideas from the perspective of librarians.⁶¹ While recognizing that librarians are often constrained by the institutional power that tools such as the *Standards* and the *Framework* impose,⁶² the full potential of a sociocultural perspective on information

58 See, for example, Bombaro, "The Framework is Elitist."

59 Mary Hamilton, "Imagining Literacy. A Sociomaterial Approach," *Beyond Economic Interests: Critical Perspectives on Adult Literacy and Numeracy in a Globalised World*, eds. Keiko Yasukawa and Stephen Black (Boston, MA: Sense Publishers 2016), 5.

60 Accardi, Drabinski, and Kumbier, *Critical Library Instruction*.

61 See, for example, Alison Hicks, "Drinking on the Job: Integrating Workplace Information Literacy into the Curriculum," *LOEX Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (2015): 9–15, http://scholar.colorado.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1060&context=libr_facpapers; Hicks, "Student Perspectives"; Wendy Holliday and Jim Rogers, "Talking about Information Literacy: The Mediating Role of Discourse in a College Writing Classroom," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 13, no. 3 (2013): 257–71, doi:10.1353/pla.2013.0025; Li Wang, Christine Bruce, and Hilary Hughes, "Sociocultural Theories and their Application in Information Literacy Research and Education," *Australian Academic and Research Libraries* 42, no. 4 (2011): 296–308, doi:10.1080/00048623.2011.10722242.

62 Emily Drabinski and Megan Sitar, "What Standards Do and What They Don't," in *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbook*, eds. Nicole Pagowsky and Kelly McElroy (Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016), 53–64.

literacy will only be realized if librarians, who play an important role in the mediation of classroom activity,⁶³ connect their voices with those of learners and scholars in the ongoing development of practice.

Information in Use

In drawing attention to the importance of collaborative and multi-modal team-work within US models of higher education, members of the *Framework* task force clearly, though indirectly, acknowledged the growing influence of sociocultural theories within teaching and learning today. Yet while the *Framework's* architects proceeded to embed the core sociocultural idea of a learning community within their very definition of information literacy, these concepts have neither been recognized nor fully developed within the ensuing conversations around the future of North American academic information literacy. This chapter set out to address these issues both by drawing attention to concepts that emerged from Australian and Scandinavian theorists in the 2000s and by arguing for the ongoing development and expansion of these ideas.⁶⁴ Coined in the 1970s, the idea of information literacy has since been naturalized within practice, as evidenced by journal guidelines that assume and discourage the problematization of (ACRL-defined) information literacy.⁶⁵ Yet, in focusing on information in use, a sociocultural perspective demonstrates that in today's complex information landscapes, information literacy is far more dynamic than is often supposed.

63 Holliday & Rogers, "Talking about Information Literacy."

64 Annemaree Lloyd, "Information Literacy: Different Contexts, Different Concepts, Different Truths?" *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 37, no. 2 (2005): 82–88, doi:10.1177/0961000605055355; Kimmo Tuominen, Reijo Savolainen, and Sanna Talja, "Information Literacy as a Sociotechnical Practice," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Communication, Policy* 75, no. 3 (2005): 329–45, doi:10.1086/497311.

65 See, for example, the Author Guidelines for the journal *Communications in Information Literacy* which assume familiarity with the nature of information literacy although the journal is "devoted to advancing research, theory, and practice in the area of information literacy in higher education." "Author Guidelines," *Communications in Information Literacy*, <http://www.comminfolit.org/index.php?journal=cil&page=about&op=submissions#authorGuidelines>.

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