The Public Academic Library: Friction in the Teflon Funnel

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Abstract

How does one engage in a radical pedagogical praxis when constrained by a growing awareness of the ways in which libraries and librarians are institutions of hegemonic order? Using Henry Giroux's work on critical pedagogy and its potential for cultivating an engaged citizenry, this article offers a rationale for developing an information literacy praxis that considers and creates opportunities for resisting the neoliberal imperatives that are re-fashioning higher education from a public good into training for the marketplace. We suggest that librarians can work to counter such a climate through thoughtful IL policy development and drop-in programming that makes critical sociopolitical interventions at particular historical moments, and offer practical descriptions of two library workshops on the 2003 Iraq War and the Occupy Movement. We conclude by exploring how one can advocate for libraries and librarians within this sort of programming, and how such advocacy is also, and necessarily, an act of radical pedagogical praxis in its intentional prioritization of democratic values and social responsibility.

Introduction

   How does one engage in a radical pedagogical praxis when constrained by a growing awareness of the ways in which academic libraries and librarians have become institutions of hegemonic order and often serve the imperatives of neoliberal capitalism that have dominated political and social discourse for the last thirty years? How might we

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develop an alternate vision of libraries as imaginative and conceptual spaces of resistance? This chapter explores these questions, and considers both the challenges and opportunities that arise when working towards a theoretically-informed praxis that gives primacy to cultivating an engaged and empowered citizenry,[2] and moves issues of social justice and social responsibility to the forefront of information literacy work.

Of particular concern is how academic librarians can resist what Henry Giroux (2010) describes as the "scourge of neoliberalism"; an interconnected system of political, social and economic practices that values the production of competent servants of the state, and the supremacy of the free market. This essay draws heavily from Giroux's (2005, 2010) work on critical pedagogy and its potential for cultivating democratic citizenship, and on the role of public institutions and public intellectuals in this process. While Giroux does not give direct attention to libraries, Gage (2004) notes that his work is highly relevant for librarians because it offers "trenchant critiques that draw out and illuminate the ways in which the production, circulation, and consumption of information, knowledge, and meaning are never innocent but instead sutured to issues of power, political economy, and specific subject positions" (p. 67). While Giroux's work has been used in recent years to explore a range of issues in librarianship (Eryaman, 2010; Lilburn, 2007), we focus specifically on his thoughts about "the vital role that critical pedagogy might play as both a language of critique and possibility by addressing the growing threat of free market fundamentalism" (Giroux, 2005, p. 210). We intersect critically with his clarion call to retake the University, acknowledging it as both "an ethical referent and a call to action" (2010, p.190), and view the cultivation of a radical information literacy praxis as a meaningful response to this call.

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[2] In this paper, the concept of citizenship refers to the classical republican tradition of active participation in governing and in being governed, rather than to more modern conceptions of contractualism between individuals and the state.

Pawley (2003) and Elmborg (2006) note that librarians have historically been reluctant to critically interrogate the concept of information literacy. Indeed, much of the practitioner scholarship on information literacy is reflective of, rather than resistant to, the core values of neoliberalism. Swanson (2004) reminds us that the ACRL standards themselves were adopted primarily as a strategic response to broad economic shifts in which knowledge has come to replace capital as the basis of the economy, and information itself has become commodified. Countering the scholarship of neoliberal accommodation is a growing body of more progressive work that addresses the importance of incorporating critical perspectives into research and practice in librarianship (Accardi, Drabinski & Kumbier, 2010; Leckie, Given & Buschman, 2010). A number of scholars have argued for more critical engagement with assumptions about information literacy, and with the standards and practices which guide our work in this area, and have advocated for the adoption of a theoretically-informed approach to teaching that recognizes that education is not itself apolitical (Elmborg, 2006; Lilburn, 2007; Jacobs, 2008; Jacobs and Berg, 2011; Luke and Kapitze, 1999).

Recognizing the value of connecting theory and practice, the authors combine a theoretical rationale for adopting a radical praxis with self-reflective accounts of the specific ways in which we have, haltingly, begun to move towards it in our own work. We examine ways that neoliberal ideology has impacted our work as academic librarians, and provide an argument for resisting the current political climate of higher education. We offer practical examples of ways for librarians to create opportunities for citizen engagement and empowerment, and explore how drop-in programming might be re-conceptualized to focus on the development of vocabularies of resistance, global information justice, and civic responsibility. We argue that such work provides a bridge by which we can connect our day-to-day work directly to the core democratizing values of the profession, and that such acts can, and should, move us closer to the tradition and

practice of progressive librarianship that has been powerfully articulated by Toni Samek (2001; 2004).

We will also argue that a turn towards a radical praxis is not only important because of its potential to empower and engage citizenry, but also because it encourages an important shift in public perception of the academic library by reminding students, faculty and librarians of the public-ness of their institutions, and the social contributions of librarians to democracy. This reminder is a critically important form of advocacy and solidarity-building for librarians at a time when the profession is undeniably in crisis (Sloniowski, 2012), and when the public spheres from which to launch a moral vision or to engage in a viable struggle against the hegemonic order are under constant threat from the corporate bottom line (Giroux, 2005). As Naomi Klein insists, librarianship is a revolutionary choice (2004).

The Scourge of Neoliberalism: The Crisis of Higher Education

Giroux (2010) points to a "general consensus among academics around the world that higher education is in a state of crisis" (p. 185), and describes the ways in which the discourse of neoliberalism has transformed social life. Giroux is among the most vociferous in his assessment of neoliberalism, noting that it has become "one of the most pervasive and dangerous ideologies of the twenty-first century" (2005, p. 210), but many others have contributed to what is now a robust critique of the global consequences of the neoliberal agenda (Chomsky, 1999; Harvey, 2005, Stiglitz, 2002).

It is difficult to offer a purely theoretical definition of neoliberalism, as the term is used to refer to a broad range of social, economic, and political practices which have been historically associated with the supply-side economic policies of the Thatcher and Reagan eras. Moreover, there is significant disagreement as to the nature and effects of

neoliberalism (Auerbach, 2007). However, Harvey (2005) offers a useful summary of

the essential characteristics of neoliberalism as an economic doctrine:

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic
> practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by
> liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional
> framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and
> free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional
> framework appropriate to such practices. (p. 2)

Using Harvey's definition as a conceptual starting point, the ideological imperatives of

neoliberalism can be broadly characterized as that which values the centrality and

effectiveness of the free market, the accumulation of capital, deregulation, privatization,

individualism and the private over public good.

Giroux (2010) argues that neoliberalism has had dramatic consequences for

higher education, and illustrates the ways in which the University has been "conscripted

to serve as corporate power's apprentice" (p. 186). He argues that institutions of higher

education are no longer being understood as a public good, but rather, are being

refashioned by and for corporate interests to meet the needs of a changing marketplace.

A full discussion of the corporatization of university campuses is beyond the scope of

this paper, but has been substantively addressed by others[3]. However, the most

troubling elements in Giroux's analysis include: the shift towards standardized, market-

driven curricula and programs, the downsizing of permanent faculty positions in favour of

contract faculty and other forms of precarious academic labour, the erosion of shared

governance between faculty and administrators, diminished understandings of academic

freedom, and a weakened conception of higher education as a political and civic

institution that is committed to addressing, or at least considering, critical social

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[3] See for instance James Turk's anthology on the corporate campus compiled in 2000, or the
bibliography at the "Living in Interesting Times" blog.
https://livingininterestingtimes.wordpress.com/resources/corporatization/

problems. Borrowing from the work of Agamben (1998), Giroux (2010) argues that universities have adopted a form of "bare pedagogy" that "strips education of its public values, critical contents and civic responsibilities as part of its broader goal of creating new subjects wedded to the logic of privatization, efficiency, flexibility, the accumulation of capital, and the destruction of the social state" (p. 185). Or, as Eisenhower and Smith (2010) argue, the University has become a sort of Teflon funnel into which students are poured, homogenized, and then shot out the other end, ready to assume their places in the knowledge economy.

The Academic Library Context

As libraries are inextricably linked to their institutions, they are not impervious to the creeping tentacles of neoliberalism. Fister (2010a) observes that "the neoliberal turn that has led to the commodification of what scholars do - teach and create knowledge - has had a profound effect on the academic library" (p. 83). There are myriad ways in which neoliberal impulses have impacted our professional culture, our collections, our physical spaces, and our labor as professional librarians. While these issues are not easily disentangled from one another, this paper will focus upon the ways in which our pedagogical work has been affected.

In relation to the teaching practices of librarians, Giroux's adaptation of the concept of "bare pedagogy" is useful in thinking about the ways in which the current political climate of knowledge production has impacted our work. For instance, the increase in precariously employed contract faculty impinges upon our ability to permanently embed information literacy in departmental curriculum. When undergraduate programs are largely taught by a revolving door of contract faculty, how can librarians successfully build relationships, develop new material and assess information literacy goals in meaningful ways?

Another example of neoliberalist logic at work in libraries lies in the eager embrace of online learning as a more flexible, efficient and innovative way to provide library instruction. Narrowly conceived in the library context as the transmission of fungible skills - online learning initiatives typically package information literacy as a general commodity to be acquired. We describe them as "learning objects," emphasizing their instrumentality. Sometimes, online tutorials are "monetized" - turning our expertise and pedagogical labour into a commodity form for commercial transaction. In this model, ownership and intellectual control often reside with institutions rather than with the person or people who write and design the tutorial. Even where librarians are able to hold copyright over their work, the technologies of online learning so far lend themselves primarily to a transactional, banking model of education that offers little in the way of relationship building (Noble, 2000), or much emphasis on information literacy as a situated process and habit of mind leading to critical thinking and an empowered citizenry.

This emphasis on information literacy pedagogy as skill-based training is prevalent in our physical classrooms as well where we often operate as extensions of the database vendors whose products we rent and encourage our students to consume for the brief time that they are with us. Many faculty seem to expect little more of us than to ensure that students know which databases to use and the mechanics of searching them. Problematically, these are not tools we have built ourselves and we are often unaware of the proprietary search algorithms that govern search and retrieval functions. We also have little control over which journals are indexed or dropped from within these tools, or which ones are given priority in large federated search tools or discovery layers. Rather than deciding for ourselves how best to organize and provide access to our collections, we let vendors define our users' research experiences and outcomes and instead "willingly serve as the corrections officers for corporate information prisons"

(Fister, 2010b, para 11). In other words, in not building our own open source, open access, and vendor agnostic research tools, we risk becoming taxpayer-subsidized training instruments for commercial entities at worst, and marketing outreach programs for the library at best.

Time is another issue. Increasingly librarians complain about lack of time as the primary obstacle to developing innovative content for their workshops and lectures. Rising student enrolments and a shrinking public sector workforce have led to poor librarian-to-student ratios at many institutions. With fewer people juggling more work, it becomes easy to fall back on database training as the sum total of our teaching efforts, rather than working towards higher level information literacy competencies. It also makes it easier to justify our unwillingness to engage in more nuanced questions about how information is used, collected, packaged, and marketed (Lilburn, 2007). Who has the time to think carefully through these questions and prepare such challenging material in ways that resonate with students while still teaching them the basic skills needed for their assignments? The neoliberal emphasis on a downsized public sector has a significant impact on our classroom content.

Lastly, the emergence of an audit culture in the 21st century university (Shore, 2008) has ramifications for librarians. Increasingly, we are asked to spend our limited time gathering data to assess our value and justify our existence and we often, perhaps unconsciously, adapt our work to be quantified accordingly. How can we be comfortable taking risks in such an environment? What is the incentive for expanding our pedagogical frame to offer, for instance, a series of new workshops which might be poorly attended or risk alienating a faculty member by insisting on critical content for one of our guest lectures? We continue to look to the number of classes and students taught as a key measure of "success" for an IL program, and rely on available summative measures of learning outcomes like SAILS, undergraduate degree level expectations

documents, and/or key performance indicators in colleges as the barometers of student

achievement and public accountability. We engage in these practices despite knowing

that they do little more than assess a range of skills rather than indicate that any actual

education has occurred. As Noble (2000) insists,

> Training involves the honing of a person's mind so that that mind can be used for
> the purposes of someone other than that person..... knowledge is usually defined
> as a set of skills or body of information designed to be put to use, to become
> operational, only in a context defined by someone other than the trained person.
> Training thus typically entails a radical divorce between knowledge and the self
> (p. 101)

The multiple neoliberal encroachments upon the work of professional librarians

described above have the impact of re-framing our teaching as training and foreclose

upon the possibility of education as a process of transformational self-awareness and

empowerment. Neoliberal logic has implications in the construction of academic

subjectivities (Shore, 2008). In this environment, librarian-as-trainer becomes complicit

in the formation of the student-as-commodity for the market.

So what can be done?

Notwithstanding these significant problems, there are always spaces of

resistance that allow academic librarians to make critical interventions at key moments.

Eisenhower and Smith (2010) suggest, somewhat cryptically, that librarians might be

able to create some friction in the Teflon funnel, and slow down that otherwise smooth

and seamless passage through the edu-factory.   Indeed, librarians are unusual agents

within institutions, marginal in many respects. However, because we work across

disciplines, in and out of the curriculum, we are also reasonably autonomous as a result

of our marginality. How might we use our unique position within the academy to effect

change? How can we resist the current climate in our professional practice and move

towards, as Giroux suggests, both the promise and the possibilities of critical

positioning? In particular, how can instruction librarians incorporate a radical praxis when, as Lilburn (2007) reminds us, we are largely constrained by widely-adopted professional standards that claim the cultivation of an informed citizenry but give no attention to political issues or how citizens can use information in a socially responsible manner? These standards run the risk, as Jacobs (2008) suggests, of reinforcing a banking model of education and compartmentalizing "information literacy's tremendous potential for creative, critical, and visionary thinking" (p. 258).

We argue the answer is two-fold. First, we take as absolutely necessary the need, as summarized convincingly by Elmborg (2006), to ground our information literacy work in a theoretically-informed, critical practice of progressive librarianship that shouldn't, and can't be, neutral. We reject positivism and explicitly acknowledge the situated and shifting subjectivities in our work. Such grounding also helps us understand the ways in which our work inevitably supports the status quo and is at times complicit in the neoliberal agenda. No one is neutral. Resistance is impossible without such awareness. Second, we take action, and those of us with academic freedom work to define alternative visions for our information literacy programs in our policies and programs.

Theory becomes Policy: Creating the Environment for Critical Pedagogy

An important first step in moving towards a pedagogical praxis focused on social justice lies not in the classroom but in thinking programmatically about a library's information literacy efforts. Rather than thinking about our teaching as purely a reaction to faculty and student demand, it is important for librarians to work together as a group and set the stage for what they would like to do with their teaching, both individually and institutionally. At the individual level this might mean developing a teaching philosophy mindful of social justice, critical thinking, global information justice and which explores

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pedagogical methods that interrogate power and authority in the library and in the classroom. At an institutional level, a policy document for the library's IL program would reflect the overarching goals and climate of the University and the library itself and would simultaneously contain the seeds that allow radical praxis to bloom. In setting our sights beyond academic success and faculty support and inserting language which gestures towards citizenship in our policy documents, we send a message to administrators, faculty and our librarian colleagues about the democratic imperatives of information literacy. In short, careful policy development can provide a spur to action. For example, in 2003 librarians at the University of Windsor in Ontario decided to define information literacy in their first policy document in accordance with the ACRL standards—with an important deviation—a 6th standard was added which focused on students' understanding of the socio-political context of information, scholarly communication and technology.[4] Where the 5th ACRL standard seems to be largely about understanding and abiding by the laws surrounding use of information, the Windsor definition opened the door to critical information literacy which considers the production of information within a social context.

Another example is at York University, where teaching librarians largely ignored the ACRL standards and developed an Information Literacy Manifesto (2005) which states,

> Our overarching purpose in developing an Information Literacy program is to graduate critically engaged, information literate citizens able to fully participate in the information society across all levels – scholarly, personal, vocational and political. Our program, therefore, will focus on enabling students to develop

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[4] "The information literate person understands cultural, economic, ethical, legal, and social issues surrounding the **production** of information." Leddy Library IL policy, 2003: http://web4.uwindsor.ca/units/leddy/leddy.nsf/ILpolicy.pdf

> information-seeking behaviours that transcend specific finding tools, to recognize the societal context of information, to think critically about the information they find and to let that information transform them.[5]

Admittedly, both policies accommodate neoliberal imperatives as was necessary in order to gain administrative support, and neither policy mapped out a specific way forward to student empowerment and citizenship. In hindsight, such accommodations may have gone too far. It is worth noting that most of the librarians involved in crafting these policies were pre-tenure and perhaps somewhat tentative in the face of authority. Jacobs and Berg's (2011) suggestion that ALA Core Values be included in information literacy policies would certainly offer a more historically grounded and generative place from which to frame our efforts. However, at the very least, these policy examples offer a touchstone for librarians to use, should they wish to move towards a more radical praxis. Such efforts can also help to develop a culture whereby thinking programmatically about what we teach includes attention to critical thinking, citizenship and social justice. Even if an individual librarian rejects such a framing, s/he is asked to consider a radical praxis, and this consideration might offer a useful epistemological rupture in and of itself. When faculty approach the library for assistance with their courses or curriculum design, the policy document can be deployed as a way of deepening the conversation about what librarians might do in and out of the classroom. When the program is advertised and the policy is made public, it also attracts progressive allies and activists. Such policies should not dictate how or what a librarian should teach, and do not by themselves enable radical praxis, but they create a space where resistance is not only possible but encouraged.

From Policy to Praxis

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[5] York University Libraries IL Manifesto, 2005.
http://www.library.yorku.ca/binaries/Home/ILManifesto.pdf

Another step in developing a theoretically informed praxis involves shifting towards a model in which drop-in workshops, lecture series and library-hosted events are valued as much as our efforts to become embedded in disciplinary curriculum. Developing our own programming is key to moving social justice and social responsibility to the centre of our information literacy work. In thinking through the types of extra-curricular programming we might offer in libraries, we should consider compelling ways to engage our community in relevant and timely civic dialogues that we believe, along with Giroux, are conducive to a substantive and flourishing democracy. We must recognize that our pedagogical work is not supplemental, but vital to the so-called "information age."

In this, we stand with Paulo Friere and other theorists in the critical pedagogy tradition who view education as a "profoundly political activity" and argue for an alternative pedagogy in which, "rather than focus on knowledge acquisition, students identify and engage significant problems in the world" (Elmborg, 2006, p. 193). However, as Jacobs (2008), adapting from the work of the New London Group on literacy reminds us, one of our most difficult tasks is to make information literacy "embodied, situated and social" for our diverse student body (p. 259). Speaking pragmatically, re-focusing on extracurricular programming as civic dialogue may increase the appeal of the workshops, resulting in higher levels of interest and attendance. It also creates opportunities for academic librarians to become a vital ingredient in the public sphere. In her "Liberation Bibliography" Fister calls for us to recognize that the world is "not separated into the scholarly and the ordinary. If knowledge matters, it must matter beyond the boundaries of our campuses, and beyond the conference halls of our scholarly societies" (2010b, para 6). Our extra-curricular programming may offer a key bridge between academic work and civic activity.

While we do not foreclose upon the possibility of a radical praxis in curriculum-integrated environments, we argue that extra-curricular programming can mitigate the significant challenges that instruction librarians face in working with curriculum that is designed by other people for other ends. Such efforts can also help to address the peculiar complexities of the relationship that academic librarians have with disciplinary faculty, even in institutions such as ours where librarians are granted full academic status, and the ways in which the dynamics of this relationship can impact, and often constrain, our own teaching practices (Eisenhower & Smith, 2010). Bearing these challenges in mind, one of the guiding philosophies of drop-in programming should be, in at least some instances, to remove the locus of control of curriculum from faculty to librarian hands and provide an alternative safe space for thinking, debating and learning on campus. We normally wait for invitations from faculty, or we elbow our way into their curriculum, making a case for our value in terms we believe they will appreciate and to which they will be responsive. Yet, these efforts ultimately reinforce the problematic and ultimately limiting dynamics of the power relationship. In our own programming, we have the opportunity to autonomously design and deliver our own material in such a way as to offer students an opportunity to integrate the ideas and learning taking place in their multiple classrooms. Such material may well be re-used in our curriculum-integrated initiatives in ways both overt and covert.

Also, it is important that in hosting workshops, panels and lectures about contemporary issues, we must maintain a constant connection, however tenuous, with the research and information literacy issues raised by the event. In so doing, we reinforce the importance of research, knowledge, and information literacy across all aspects of one's life and begin to work towards a new pedagogical model for library instruction, as will be demonstrated by the two following case studies. These events were not research workshops per se, but offered a sort of stealth information literacy

instruction packaged inside a broader context. Or, in keeping with Noble's (2000) view of education, the information literacy instruction is not divorced from content and hence new knowledge is not divorced from the self. In other words, the boundaries between the subject matter of the event and the information literacy skills being encouraged were porous and seamless, fostering an understanding of research as a socially necessary and situated act central not only to one's academic activities and future role in the marketplace, but to one's whole engagement with society.

Case Study #1: Can You Trust the Media? The Leddy Library Iraq War Teach-In

In March 2003 during the immediate lead up to the American invasion of Iraq, I (Lisa Sloniowski) and a colleague, Mita Williams, were employed at the Leddy Library at the University of Windsor and attended several anti-war demonstrations. The war was particularly resonant for the citizens of Windsor, partly because of a large population of Middle Eastern communities on both sides of the Windsor/Detroit border, but also because, perhaps more than many places in Canada, the spectre of U.S. militarism confronted us daily due to our immediate proximity to the border and our regular crossings back and forth over the Ambassador bridge or through the Detroit/Windsor tunnel. At these border checkpoints, signs of ever higher alert were manifesting daily. Amidst this charged environment, Mita and I began to wonder if we should be organizing something in the library, particularly after overhearing a group of concerned professors talking at a demonstration about the need to hold teach-ins on campus once the U.S. declared war. We very quickly organized a teach-in that brought together a panel of media scholars, philosophers and librarians who spoke about the relatively uncritical acceptance of the war in the North American mainstream press as well as the rhetorical strategies deployed by the supporters of the war—in essence, the ways in which support for the war was discursively produced. From an information literacy perspective, the

librarians' role in organizing the panel was to draw attention not only to these discursive practices, but also to the research implications emanating from the silencing of dissent in the mainstream press for people trying to get current and accurate information. To assist people in gathering a wider range of viewpoints, we built a subject guide to both alternative and mainstream news sources and presented it at the event.[6] We saw this guide as a tool for library instruction but also as a form of collection development not usually performed in libraries, and tried to make this collection activity transparent to our teach-in attendees. We made the point that by not providing space for the voices of dissent in the present, the mainstream media made it very difficult for a record of such resistance to be preserved for scholars in the future. We made it clear that this erasure was in fact why we were hosting this event in the library. It served to remind them that librarians have a praxis and agenda of our own that embraces cultural stewardship and access to information. We were not apolitical; in fact we were outraged.

We were particularly surprised by the turnout. We were just heading into exam period, we held the event in the evening, and in a room at the top of the library not visible from the front entrance. For advertising, we had postered the campus a few days in advance of the event and flyered at another campus demonstration the day before. Despite little marketing and the awkward time and location, we had approximately 100 students and faculty show up. When we saw how heavily the subject guide was used in the days that followed, we knew we were on to something.

There was also great feedback from attendees. We heard from a graduate student who said she had been very troubled by the media coverage but didn't know how to get other opinions until our event. She also mentioned that she had been lacking a vocabulary to explain her concerns and this event helped her articulate her resistance..

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[6] Iraq 2003: sources of news. Available online at:
https://ospace.scholarsportal.info/handle/1873/45

There were other benefits for us personally as well. In building our subject guide, we discovered many alternative press sources, learned about political rhetorical strategies, and sharpened our own analysis of mainstream media. In other words, this form of critical pedagogy positions librarians as learners and citizens as well as teachers. It made me think differently about my responsibilities for collection development, questions with which I still wrestle. Over time it became evident that there were not many portals collecting both the voices of mainstream media and those of dissent, and subsequently we were linked to by a number of news sites and public library sites. We were told that public librarians appreciated our site as they did not have the academic freedom to create such guides in their own workplaces.

Faculty who spoke or attended the teach-in were universally grateful to us for hosting the event, and began to see librarians in a new light. We were invited to speak at conferences about the event; librarian conferences and non-academic conferences. We became visible to other activists on campus. I eventually left the university for a job at another, but Mita Williams continued thinking about citizenship and information literacy and has subsequently hosted the Windsor Essex Change Camp at the Windsor Public library (WPL), an unconference dedicated to rethinking government in the age of participation, with some of the WPL public librarians and Dr. Nicole Noel from the University's Centre for Social Justice. Williams cites the teach-in as the inspiration for this next event. For me, it was the precursor to both the Information Literacy Manifesto at York University, and our next case study, the "Occupy your Mind" knowledge sharing circle.

Case Study #2: Occupy your Mind at Scott Library, York University

In August 2011, Lisa Sloniowski and I (Patti Ryan) were both returning to work after year-long leaves, and began to talk about the ways in which our reading and

thinking over the previous year had impacted our intentions for information literacy work. Years earlier, the Information Literacy Manifesto had provided a blueprint for grounding our teaching practices in a framework of social responsibility, and we were interested in revisiting those principles as a way to engage our community in social justice issues. By mid-September, we had mapped out provisional plans for a series of drop-in workshops that would focus on current events and would, we hoped, create opportunities for our students to connect their classroom learning to what was happening in the world around them. We came up with a working title, the "Research for Citizenship" series, and set up a blog[7] to keep track of ideas and as a way to keep thinking and writing about the role of libraries and librarians in creating spaces of resistance.

As those early conversations took place, the Occupy Movement was unfolding around us, and it soon became clear that we had the topic for an inaugural event. By mid-October, the Occupy Wall Street protest had spread to over 150 cities, and Toronto's Occupy site had been set up in a downtown park, and was gaining momentum. As we started to think through the information literacy issues related to the movement and about the questions we might explore in a public forum, we were continuously struck by the close connections between the emerging values of the Occupy Movement and those that have traditionally animated librarianship--specifically, sharing, education, openness, and the importance of public spaces. The role of the People's Library in various Occupy sites reinforced these connections for us and led to us think more deeply about the role of the libraries in the movement. We visited the Toronto occupation and came away inspired by the commitment of the people involved and noted that some of our students and faculty were amongst their ranks. With these ideas swirling around and in the face of increasing curiosity about Occupy from our community, our first event began to take shape.

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[7] http://researchforcitizenship.wordpress.com/

Taking our pedagogical cues from the Occupy protests, we organized a knowledge sharing circle in the atrium of the Scott Library, the largest and busiest library in the York University Library system. We promoted the "Occupy your Mind" event for less than a week, advertising it as an opportunity for community members to come together for a participatory and informal discussion about Occupy. Although we were intent on preserving the non-hierarchical and leaderless format of Occupy, we did invite David McNally, a well-known activist and scholar of social movements, hoping that his presence would help to generate interest. We papered the library and parts of the campus with flyers that we quickly produced ourselves and advertised the event on all the relevant campus websites and listservs. In the days leading up to the event, we had to resist our ingrained impulses to over-prepare, but we did think carefully about the information issues arising from Occupy and its penetration into the public consciousness. After much discussion, we prepared ourselves to explore together with students one question: "What exactly is Occupy?" In framing the event around a problem to be posed, rather than information to be delivered, closely aligned our vision of information literacy to that offered by Jacobs and Berg (2011) who suggest,

> [r]ather than viewing information literacy teaching as a kind of banking where librarians deposit knowledge about how to identify, evaluate, find, and use information, if we position ourselves and our students as critical co-investigators in the problem-posing education of information literacy, we begin to move toward a critical information literacy praxis where we can work toward the ideals of critical literacy such as democracy, equity, shared decision making, empowerment, and transformative action in addition to the ideals articulated in the Alexandria Proclamation. (p. 390)

In our usual workshops and guest lectures we would have approached the event as experts in helping students find the answers to their research questions. In this case, we approached the event as learners ourselves, and recognized that while we had some information we could share, so could others in our community. And in pointing to our need to learn more, we not only foregrounded our own social concerns, but also pointed

to an information literacy issue, namely, that amidst all the noise in both the mainstream and alternative press about any historical event, one has to pick and choose very carefully through multiple streams of information from various perspectives before arriving at one's own analysis. In other words, we modelled information literacy as a lifelong and inherently social process, rather than a commodity to be acquired.

After the introduction and our broad-based opening question, a wide-ranging and at times penetrating discussion started to unfold. Lisa and I were both struck by the level of engagement and articulateness of the students, and the self-reflectiveness of their comments. One of the most powerful exchanges occurred when one participant offered a forceful critique of the movement, and drew particular attention to its insularity, lack of openness to marginalized groups, and to the reports of sexual assault and rape at several Occupy sites. As we listened to several other students respond thoughtfully to her astute critique, even though it generated very difficult emotions in the group, we were quietly reminded of the raw power and authenticity of student voices that can emerge when we actively work to create conditions to support them.

The event resulted in unprecedented attendance for a Scott Library drop-in workshop. There were approximately 70 people in the circle at most points during the two hour event, and since it was held in a visible area of the library, we were able to attract passersby who were curious about the gathering. It was serendipitous browsing from our perspective. While we are hopeful that discussion itself helped a few people to think more about Occupy and its significance to their own lives as citizens, we were even more encouraged by developments that followed. We were excited to see a number of students gather immediately after the event to compile an email list to continue the discussion and organize in some way. We were interviewed by a student journalist at another university and our event was covered in our own student newspaper (Perlin, 2011). Two weeks later, we were approached by the president of a student association

to participate in a student-run Occupy event. This was the first time in memory that we have been invited to attend a student event in which we were not asked to talk about "the library" or information literacy in particular, but rather, asked to participate as community members with a shared interest in a timely social issue. This lent some weight to our hunch that holding the event in the library would help our community to make deeper intellectual connections between the idea of libraries and the public good, and to the ways in which librarians can work as allies for social change.

The Occupy Research Guide was linked to and shared in the social media by a number of Occupy-related websites and groups and had unexpectedly high traffic.[8] This issue-specific guide disrupted our library's adherence to traditional discipline-based subject guides, and provided a template for thinking about how we might use them to draw attention to other relevant social and political issues. As with the Iraq media coverage subject guide, the creation of the subject guide allowed us to collect and curate alternative press voices and foreground material outside mainstream debate and typical scholarly sources while also serving as a lead-in to various scholarly databases, data sources and influential authors who had inspired the movement. The guide works on the sidelines to offer students ways into socio-political information which might answer or further complicate their questions about Occupy or social protest in general. We also had a page within the guide about the Occupy Libraries, drawing attention to the role of libraries and librarians in counter-cultural movements. In keeping with the notion that students could be our critical co-investigators in attempting to learn more about the

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[8] Available online at: http://researchguides.library.yorku.ca/occupy

movement, we encouraged suggestions for the guide and were delighted to receive a few links to articles and forums from interested students.

Praxis makes Perfect?

As mentioned above, benefits of both case studies were myriad—heightened student engagement, relationship building, development of new knowledge around political issues, and conference and publication opportunities due to professional interest in the work, just to name a few. Other benefits were simultaneously immeasurable. For example, we'll never know how our work might have led to moments of personal and political resistance or citizenry supported by responsible information-seeking behaviour. Perhaps, in the current climate, designing events whose outcomes are immeasurable is an act of radical praxis in and of itself. At any rate, we acknowledge that the acts described are but brief moments of resistance that are often quickly subsumed by the logic of neoliberalism. Our case studies do not represent massive revolution in and of themselves. We remain conscious of the ways in which the success of such work may ultimately reinforce the values of a neoliberal agenda, and the ways in which our efforts might be "subsumed in its Foucauldian way into numbers that scaffold the very discourse we critique" (Eisenhower and Smith, 2010, p. 305). Indeed, in both cases our administration was highly supportive of our efforts. We maintain, however, that no matter how our efforts may be rationalized or used by administrators, our pedagogical efforts may lead to moments of citizen resistance that live well beyond the annual report. They offer hope rather than despair within the daily grinding of the machinery of the edu-factory, create friction in the Teflon funnel, forge connections and inspire us to further acts of political praxis, both in and outside of the university.

Advocacy and Solidarity

Finally, we'd like to emphasize the impact this work has in terms of re-framing librarianship in the public eye. In focusing our programming on our core professional values—knowledge, sharing, common space, cultural stewardship, freedom of expression and freedom of information—we also quietly underscore our societal role and exemplify the many ways in which librarians can and do contribute to the public good. The academic library may be seen as uniquely critical to the public sphere as a community centre and town hall in the midst of intellectual communities. By emphasizing contemporary issues surrounding the socio-political production of information in our information literacy programming, we demonstrate our relevance at a time of rapid technological change. Our relevance lies not in training people how to use new tools, but as thinkers and citizens particularly engaged in questioning the shifting social complexities of the new information landscapes. At a time when some believe technology is set to replace print culture and, by extension, libraries and librarianship, the de-valuing of the work of librarians must be understood as part of the larger scourge of neoliberalism which seeks to shrink the public sector and lock down information as a profit-making commodity. The praxis outlined in this paper suggests we actively seek to build solidarity with our communities, as allies and equals, rather than as servants, information gatekeepers and/or pedagogues. In so doing, we make common cause with students and faculty, we build grassroots support, and wear our public-ness like a suit of armour (Klein, 2004). We occasionally destabilize the hegemonic institutions in which we are embedded. In fostering civic engagement in our student body, we develop a wider horizon upon which to gain perspective on our professional and personal struggles, and we immerse ourselves in the wider battles for social and political change. We live inside the ruptures and contradictions of a revolutionary choice.

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