

Journal of Information Literacy

ISSN 1750-5968

Volume 17 Issue 1

June 2023

Editorial

Smith, L. N., & Hicks, A. 2023. Taking stock of critical information literacy. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 17(1), pp. 1–5.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/17.1.3416>



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Taking stock of critical information literacy

Lauren N. Smith, Senior Liaison Librarian, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. Email: LSmith1@gmu.ac.uk. ORCID: [0000-0002-4467-2234](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4467-2234).

Alison Hicks, Lecturer (Assistant Professor), Department of Information Studies, University College London. Email: a.hicks@ucl.ac.uk. ORCID: [0000-0002-2124-1730](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2124-1730).

This special issue marks the culmination of over a year of planning on the editors' part, and several hard months of writing, reviewing, and copyediting from the various authors and key players within the JIL scholarly infrastructure. As editors of this special issue, we originally set out with the goal of pushing the boundaries of critical information literacy (CIL) as it is currently understood. The field of CIL has been expanding gradually since Drabinski and Kumbier's collection *Critical Library Instruction* (2010), as Tewell comprehensively covers in his 2015 summary. More recently, the field has profited from valuable practical publications, including Pagowsky and Kelly's *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbooks* (2016) and Brookbank and Haigh's collection *Critical Library Pedagogy in Practice* (2021), which focus on good practice for critical approaches to information literacy (IL) instruction and teaching in higher education. From our UK experience, it also seems that discussions around how to make education and teaching more inclusive and socially just more often include acknowledgement that libraries and librarians have a role to play, and that more librarians are both exploring critical pedagogies and applying them to their IL practices.

However, while we welcomed recent useful volumes exploring critical pedagogy in library contexts, we were also keen to interrogate what CIL might look like in the 2020s, given the changing roles of librarians, increasingly prominent global health, environmental and financial crises, as well as nuanced understandings of the scope and possibility of critical information practice. These questions formed the basis of the call for papers for this special issue of *JIL*—and we are pleased to report that authors responded to this call with enthusiasm. What we hoped for, and are so thankful to have received, is a wide-reaching set of papers that touch different areas of life and society as well as interrogating a number of truths, including the traditional academic focus of CIL, its theoretical underpinnings, and its presence within professional documents. For instance, we're delighted to have submissions from authors considering under-developed areas like social class, emotion, and affect, and communicating the contribution that these lenses can make to CIL theory and practice. It's also wonderful to see contributions from authors working to take CIL beyond higher education, into the workplace, including social work, exploring the roots of critical theory and its application to IL, and applying CIL in the digital world, in both Wikipedia as an activist practice and as a way of understanding online conspiracy theories. Collected in this special issue, these papers not only demonstrate the relevance of CIL in a wide range of areas but also illustrate how the field is connecting to existing theoretical frameworks and building upon these to create something new. We believe these papers all contribute to advancing CIL theory and practice in different ways and we are grateful to the authors for taking on this challenge.

It wasn't always plain sailing, however, and we were initially taken aback at the volume of enquiries we received about whether a paper on critical thinking would fall under the scope of this Special Issue. Several authors have linked critical thinking to IL with a handful further making an explicit connection to CIL (e.g., Hollis, 2019). However, many questions remain about the value or even feasibility of linking the two concepts, particularly given CIL's contextual emphasis and the weight that critical thinking places upon individual cognitive endeavour. These enquiries therefore served to remind us that, critiques related to the institutionalisation of

CIL notwithstanding (Seale, 2020), considerable ongoing work remains to be done if a critical approach to IL is a) to be distinguished and b) achieve its goals. These questions become even more pressing as critical librarianship becomes more normalised, as we are starting to see in several library conferences.

Another one of our key goals was to make the call for papers as inclusive as possible, supporting new authors to submit contributions and offering as many ways of achieving that as possible. We approached this in a few different ways. As is standard for *JIL*, we considered traditional theoretical/research-based manuscripts and were open to practice-based contributions, reflecting our acknowledgement that valuable knowledge can come from theory and practice, and that traditional models and conceptions of academic rigour may contribute to the exclusion of knowledge, marginalisation of voices that have something to say, and reproduction of injustices that CIL itself is seeking to challenge. We also wanted to be open to contributions in formats beyond the traditional written manuscript, including zines, photo- or video-essays, research agendas, collaborative discussions, or audio recordings, reflecting our belief that knowledge can be conveyed in a range of forms and that alternative formats may be a more accessible way of doing that for some individuals. Although we are sad to not have been able to apply this concept to this special issue, we anticipate that this might be seen more and more in future outputs. Finally, we offered a mentoring process for first-time authors who felt they would benefit from support in getting their work into shape for publication. We're so very grateful to those who volunteered to mentor. Again, unfortunately this idea didn't take the shape we'd hoped it would, but we think it's important to share that this was something we tried, and that might be a useful approach, to try again or differently in this context or another.

The special issue also still reveals several gaps and silences, particularly around geographic representation. While we are pleased to welcome a contribution from Brazil, authorship in this special issue remains predominantly focused on North American and UK contexts. We also note that despite Sofia Leung and Jorge López McKnight's powerful calling out of CIL's failure to problematise white supremacy within its literature, there is a similar lack of focus on racialised oppression within this special issue, except for Silva and Scott's project report. We recognise these oversights and will continue to examine JIL's role in both constraining and enabling the publication of these papers.

Looking at the individual contributions in more detail, the first paper in this special issue is by Alex Hewitt, looking at the role of affect and emotion in academic and research information literacy practices. Drawing on various critical approaches, including Holocaust librarianship and Indigenous conceptions of relationality, Hewitt explores the ways dominant approaches to IL have overlooked the reality of how emotion influences people's information needs and behaviours. Drawing on an ethics of care, Hewitt considers how a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to understanding and practising IL, in which affect, and emotion are acknowledged as active dimensions of people's information experiences, may create more inclusive and effective outcomes, particularly with marginalised students. This paper was copy-edited by Harriet David.

The second paper is written by Dijana Šobota, and it explores the emerging field of critical workplace IL. Arguing that there is a discursive gap in IL, Šobota asserts that CIL in the context of the workplace could enable workers to achieve improved labour conditions, applying the concept of 'decent work' as a desired outcome. Taking CIL, and IL in general, outwith its common confines of higher education, this paper uses Šobota and Špiranec's construct of critical workplace information literacy to suggest starting points for responding to crises in working conditions through fostering critical understanding of how the world of work works, identifying structures and forces of power, and empowering workers to challenge injustices through autonomy and voice in the workplace. This paper was copy-edited by Harriet David.

The next paper is a collaborative ethnography written by Darren Flynn, Teresa Crew, Rosie Hare, Krishna Maroo and Andrew Preater and connects CIL to working class experiences of higher education workers in the UK. The authors give narrative accounts of their own experiences as students as well as as higher education workers, describing values and assumptions built into areas such as the 'neutrality' of librarianship, library policies and procedures, and ways of interpreting student behaviours. Hegemonic approaches to IL are problematised and the authors suggest that the needs of working-class students are often not met by dominant practices of libraries and IL, suggesting that a solution to this problem is for working class library workers to build local networks and for librarianship more widely to consider social class as part of intersectional approaches to tackling inequity in higher education. This paper was copy-edited by Amber Edwards.

We return to workplace IL in Sara Sharun's paper, which uses phenomenography to explore how critical information work is experienced by social workers in Canada. Noting that professional information activities are underscored by a strong sense of ethical values, this research paper also provides useful insights into the tensions that are inherent within this sector, including when information is seen to be unhelpful or unwanted. The paper employs a mixed methods survey and interview design and stands out for its careful consideration of implications for teaching. This paper was copyedited by Tom Peach.

In contrast, Matthew Hannah's research paper takes a critical approach to professional documents in his exploration of the impact that deep-fake, crowd-sourced conspiratorial information environments have on IL narratives. Using QAnon as an example, Hannah analyses the ACRL Framework to illustrate how followers of conspiracy theories draw upon similar precepts and approaches to those that are presented within professional librarian documents. Highlighting the inherent complexity that lies behind the maxim of 'doing your own research,'" Hannah's paper incorporates suggestions for how we might reframe CIL education to meet these and other emerging challenges. This paper was copyedited by Kirsten McCormick.

The final research paper of this section comes from Marco Schneider and Arthur Bezerra Coelho, who dive deep into the theoretical origins of CIL, with a particular focus on Hegel, Marx, and Bloch. Purposefully pushing the field beyond its typical focus on Paulo Freire, whose work is often cited as one of the key inspirations for CIL, the authors argue that a better understanding of critical theory will lead to the more robust development of what has often been an under-theorised field. Strongly focused on philosophical thought, the paper nonetheless situates these ideas firmly within contemporary information challenges and phenomena.

We were also pleased to receive two project reports, both of which report on practical implementation of pedagogically focused CIL projects in the United States. The first of the project reports is by Simone Williams and Elizabeth Kamper, who explore academic librarians' experiences of incorporating CIL into their work. Finding that a notable proportion of respondents have experienced pushback, including negative comments, denial, dismissal, obstruction, passivity, lack of co-operation, control, and other responses, the authors open the door to further conversations about how CIL praxis can and may manifest in potentially hostile environments in higher education. This paper was copy-edited by Harriet David. In the second project report, Elise Silva and Khirsten Scott present findings from a Wikipedia editing project that was designed to critically support how young Black girls enact digital literacy practices. Informed by Black feminist pedagogy, this project illustrates how CIL principles can be integrated into every stage of the editing process, as well as the benefits of such an approach. This project report was copyedited by Andrea Brooks.

It's hard to imagine that there is more richness within the pages of the June issue of JIL, but lo, we also bring you a regular issue, which includes an additional five fascinating research papers and a project report!

First up in the regular issue of JIL is a research paper exploring the role that IL played in helping Chinese international students to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Written by Huan Gao and employing a transnational framework, which recognises that migration incorporates multiple cultural boundaries, this paper presents empathetic insight into the numerous risks that these students faced and the information strategies they employed to mediate them. The paper further stands out for its use of a narrative enquiry methodology, which helped to challenge preconceptions and facilitate a rich, co-created account of cultural ways of knowing. This paper was copyedited by Tom Peach.

Our second research paper also challenges assumptions—more concretely, related to the role that digital literacy and Instagram plays in supporting youth activism. Focusing on how young people share infographics, this research paper employs photo-elicitation and semi-structured interviews to examine how digital literacy practices are shaped through the affordances of photo-sharing platforms, including related to evidence, reliability, and authority. Written by Ella Burrows, this paper stands out for its unique and careful unpacking of dynamic, platform specific digital literacy practices. This paper was copyedited by Andrea Brooks.

The third research paper changes tack completely, examining policymaking in Zimbabwe and the role that IL plays in supporting the production of research evidence. Authored by Ronald Munatsi, the paper draws upon interviews from various Zimbabwean ministries to illustrate the wide range of policy-making contexts in which IL is helpful as well as the impact that the non-linear nature of policymaking has upon information activity. A welcome addition to political workplace IL literature, this paper also stands out for its insight into the complexities of governmental work. This paper was copyedited by Batul Alsaraji.

For our fourth paper, we focus on the health sciences where authors Devon Olson, Sandi L. Bates, Shannon Yarbrough, Sara Westall, Megan Keely Carroll Denis, and Montanna Barnet carried out a scoping review of curriculum mapping in medical librarianship. Revealing varying approaches to curriculum mapping, which include mapping against outdated IL models or ignoring this work completely, Olson and co-authors draw out new emphases within medical librarianship IL education as well as a fuzzy linking with evidence-based practice. Given these issues, the paper also recognises that considerable future research is needed—here's hoping this challenge is accepted. This paper was copyedited by Harriet David.

The final research paper takes an integrative approach to compare how IL is conceptualised across primary, secondary, and tertiary education contexts. Carrying out a qualitative systematic review, authors Caitlin Taylor and Daniela DiGiacomo highlight dominant approaches to IL across this literature, including related to models, stakeholders, and broader disciplines. Highlighting the increasing complexity of IL research, this approach is also valued for its work to work across educational transitions. This paper was copyedited by Amber Edwards.

Lastly, we are also pleased to welcome a project report that was written by Neil Dixon and Andrea Packwood. Focusing on the use of Canvas MasterPaths, this project report provides a clear overview of how the authors used and assessed this useful technological feature. This project report was copyedited by Kirsten McCormick.

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