

## Anniversary of IL special issue 2024

# “Do as I say, not as I do...”: A present (and future) concern about the pedagogy of hypocrisy and information literacy

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## Abstract

It is important to align what we teach with how we teach information literacy (IL), otherwise we may inadvertently engage with what Hipple et al. (2021) identify as the *pedagogy of hypocrisy* through neoliberal pressure in higher education. This occurs when there is a misalignment between the values and principles behind what we teach and the pedagogical approaches we take when teaching. For example, when teaching IL concepts that intend to engage with social justice themes around access privilege and information, the pedagogy of hypocrisy can occur when we simply demonstrate how to access library resources on the library’s website, without engaging in critical conversations about systems that contribute to inequities in access within society. To counter this, Hipple et al. (2021) suggest that those who teach must critically reflect on who they teach for, examine how they use and activate (or co-opt) social justice language, and name dominant and oppressive structures. This paper builds on Hipple’s argument to suggest ways of recognising the pedagogy of hypocrisy within IL practices, and argues that this recognition is key to countering hegemonic ideologies within LIS teaching.

## Keywords

critical information literacy; information literacy; library instruction; neoliberalism; pedagogy

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## 1. Introduction

As academic librarians, we take on new pedagogical trends, for example, blended learning, mobile learning, gamification, etc., with the hope that students will better engage with critical

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thinking and information literacy (IL), and in some cases, deal with the limited time we have in a classroom. One of the challenges that librarians may face when teaching IL is the alignment between who we teach (students), what we teach (concepts) and how we teach (pedagogy). This attempt to align these three things are often impeded by neoliberal pressures to conform to pedagogical trends (Rowe, 2020; Macrine, 2016). Soto and Pérez-Milans (2018) observe that "...who gets to decide what counts as proper teaching and learning cannot be detached from wider institutional and historical struggles over legitimisation of broader social/moral categories concerned with competence and citizenship..." (p. 492). Universities under neoliberal pressures co-opt language and concepts from trending pedagogies to meet labour market demands. For example, in Canada, the experiential learning trend (also referred to as work-integrated learning) was taken up by universities across the country with government and institutional funds supporting the adoption of experiential learning (Universities Canada, 2018). In most cases, institutions have taken the term experiential learning to mean internships and industry connections for work experience rather than the original intention which focused on the learning process that emphasises the re-contextualising of concepts and ideas through different experiences (not necessarily work-related), as well as the use of reflection on the experience as a part of the learning process (Kolb, 1984). In addition, this tension between what we teach and how we teach has also been largely ignored in favour of pedagogical trends that governments reward through funding, grants, and teaching awards. Another example of government influence on pedagogical trends is seen through e-learning. Its rise began in the early 2000s and peaked by 2010 in Library & Information Science (LIS) and higher education (Das, 2021; Valverde-Berrocoso et al., 2020). E-learning in higher education was taken up for a variety of reasons including maximising profit margins for some higher education institutions (Byrd and Mixon, 2012) and due to government policies tied to funding (MacKeogh and Fox, 2009).

In addition to falling into the pedagogy of hypocrisy, the pressure to take up pedagogical trends can be problematic as it assumes there is a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching that changes every few years, and it ignores the localised and contextual needs of the students. Moreover, the neoliberal co-option of various pedagogies largely focuses on outcomes, for example, work-related skills building, rather than the learning process or concepts. Ashby-King (2024) also identifies how neoliberalism and whiteness are intertwined, which can affect the way we teach concepts related to diversity and justice. In the context of libraries, this may also mean that critical IL or IL through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens may be superficially done or excluded in favour of content that is perceived to contribute to labour market skills. More concerningly, if librarians quickly take up pedagogies from areas related to CRT or decolonisation due to institutional & government policies and financial rewards, they can cause more harm to racialised and Indigenous students. Hipple et al. (2021) identify this misalignment between student needs, content, and pedagogy as the *pedagogy of hypocrisy*.

## 2. Pedagogy of Hypocrisy

Hipple et al. (2021) use the term *pedagogy of hypocrisy* in social work education to describe this conflict between *what* one teaches and *how* one teaches. They give examples where racialised students are taught concepts and frameworks centring on Western scholars and white experiences despite claims about the importance of diversity and equity in their field. This conflict can go unrecognised if we simply take on pedagogical trends in the higher education field without some form of critical reflection to identify whether what we teach aligns with how we

teach it. More importantly, we must be willing to recognise how we model through teaching and contribute to the reproduction of problematic ideologies that teach students neoliberal, racist, and/or colonial logic. Hipple et al. (2021) identify how whiteness and white students are often centred in the learning experience and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) students become secondary, or an afterthought. Hipple et al. (2021) identify a centring of white comfort in social work education, and noted how conversations and lessons were always structured to ensure the comfort of white students by soothing their discomfort. The examination of one's teaching methods and practices through the pedagogy of hypocrisy ensures that when librarians take up a critical pedagogical approach such as culturally responsive teaching, it is done thoughtfully and responsibly and not due to trends or neoliberal pressures.

### 3. Pedagogy of Hypocrisy in LIS

Nicholson et al. (2019) discuss the impact of neoliberal ideology, as well as the pressures on how librarians view the concept of time within their professional identity in relation to teaching, which often results in the heavy use of library learning analytics. They write,

...the need for the academic library to demonstrate efficiency, accountability, and return-on-investment, is marked by two competing and conflicting temporal orders. The first is the accelerated and compressed timescape of just-in-time service models; the second is the timescape of a present-future, whose primary value lies in staving off the risk of a library-less future (Nicholson et al., 2019, p. 57).

Moreover, a recent special issue edited by Pagowsky (2022) on *Disrupting Narratives of the One-Shot Instruction Model* explores one-shots through a critical theory, critical race, and feminist lens. Some of the authors discuss from varying positions how one-shot instruction reinforces ideologies such as neoliberalism, whiteness, and inequity to name a few, which counters critical IL concepts around justice and naming oppressive structures. This neoliberal ideology in universities and libraries has also impacted the way librarians teach IL, as demonstrated by the dominant practice of one-shot instruction. Institutional pedagogical trend-hopping combined with the dominance of one-shot instruction most certainly creates a setting that invites the pedagogy of hypocrisy, particularly for critical IL and critical pedagogies.

Rather than adopting pedagogical trends too quickly, academic librarians must thoughtfully identify an alignment between the student needs, content, and pedagogy to strengthen conceptual learning and ensure the use of inclusive teaching methods. For example, when teaching concepts with diverse perspectives, librarians could adopt the approach of culturally responsive teaching. This method uses "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students..." (Gay, 2018, p. 36) which may generate live discussions and the sharing of perspectives on a research topic by students, as well as presenting various research methodologies that go beyond the basic quantitative or qualitative binary. In a pedagogy of hypocrisy scenario, we might see a librarian identifying diverse perspectives as a concept, followed by a short, 20-minute one-shot session demonstrating a database search using a pre-selected topic for demonstration. The exclusion of various perspectives on a research topic, as well as the students and their interests and experiences is counterintuitive to culturally responsive teaching. If librarians want to deepen IL concepts to include justice-related ones such as information privilege, it is important to align

these concepts by first identifying the learning needs of the students and a pedagogy that reflects their needs and the content. Freire's (2018) critical pedagogy could be one approach to this; by teaching information privilege which highlights oppressive structures, librarians can create an inclusive and respectful space for students with varying forms of information privilege.

## 4. Disrupting the Pedagogy of Hypocrisy

Hipple et al. (2021) identify reflective prompts for social work education in deconstructing the pedagogy of hypocrisy and through their own experiences, form questions that aim to disorient and disrupt our routines and dominant practices as professionals. When adapted to IL teaching, the three prompts should elicit:

- a. the use of critical reflection on teaching practices;
- b. the examination of one's use of language and concepts, and address any issues of co-option or hypocrisy in content and pedagogy; and
- c. the embedding of critical IL which highlights oppressive structures.

### 4.1 Critical Self-Reflection

The original reflective prompt by Hipple et al. (2021) asks: "[h]ow is our awareness training structured? Do we focus on supporting White students in their process of identifying their biases while telling students of color how to change professionally?" (p. 476). This prompt is intended to help teachers identify ways to engage with students in critical self-reflection. Note the word "critical" in the phrase. Often, the assumption of awareness of what one has learned is assumed to be awareness building and while it does engage in some self-reflection, in the education and social work field, the addition of the word critical means also recognising one's positionality, including privilege and power structures that exclude or oppress (Brookfield, 1994; 1995; 2015; Tripp, 2011). Thus, to disrupt a pedagogy of hypocrisy, librarians should engage or continue to engage with learning opportunities such as training, and reading texts from an array of areas that extend beyond the LIS field such as social work, education, equity studies, etc. Kishimoto (2018) cautions that when using critical pedagogies, it is important to critically reflect on how we develop and present content as we can often assume that we are exempt from this practice if we utilise critical theories in our research and work.

### 4.2 Words into Action

Hipple et al. (2021) identify the co-option of social justice terms in institutions that result in lip service. Their prompt on terminology encourages the consideration of what terms we use and why: "Does our terminology reflect our LIS or critical IL practices, or are we merely paying lip service to the increasing market for social justice?" (Hipple et al., 2021, p. 476). The Association of College and Research Libraries Framework (2015) identifies some knowledge practices and dispositions that engage with critical thinking which question the structures, as well as using terminology to signal (in parts of the Framework) equity and diversity. For example, the framework identifies the following disposition: "...question traditional notions of granting authority and recognize the value of diverse ideas and worldviews" (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015, p. 13). Though the framework mentions diverse views and perspectives a few more times, in practice, pedagogical approaches that do acknowledge diverse experiences and

views require representations of diverse views in the session, as well as activities that prompt students to unpack and identify dominant narratives and counternarratives. Addressing the translation of words into action also requires time, as a librarian will need training, time in the classroom, relationship-building, trust with students, and the ability to navigate feelings of discomfort. It is important to recognise how neoliberal ideology and logic impact time in the classroom. More importantly, library administration and library managers must advocate and push for change which gives teaching librarians more time and resources to learn and engage with pedagogies that reflect students' needs and IL concepts.

### **4.3 Names of Dominant and Oppressive Structures**

Hipple et al. (2021) write that "in order to pursue greater equity and anti-racist practices and futures, both micro and macro-systems must name and subsequently work to dismantle the deep-seeded [sic] roots of dehumanization that have been enacted and maintained through capitalism and colonization" (p. 463). Kishimoto (2018) identifies that this is often challenging as teachers and students alike may feel overwhelmed by such a feat. When identifying where or when the pedagogy of hypocrisy may occur, it is also important to recognise the hegemonic ideologies and practices that impact librarian teaching practices. Specifically, the naming and resistance to neoliberal, whiteness, and/or colonial logic in our libraries and teaching environments. It is important to recognise the ideology embedded in institutional structures and practices. In this case, we must question institutional and government interventions and influence over teaching and examine who truly benefits from dominant pedagogical trends through a critical lens.

## **5. Conclusion**

By recognising a pedagogy of hypocrisy in teaching IL, we humble ourselves. To disrupt problematic ideologies and logic such as whiteness, neoliberalism, and colonialism, we must ensure that we take up critical pedagogy when teaching IL concepts in actual practice. More importantly, academic library managers must encourage, advocate, and ensure time for teaching librarians to properly learn and engage with pedagogies that align with IL concepts. Though we do not intend to be hypocrites or purposefully engage with the pedagogy of hypocrisy, it is important to reflect on this concept, even if it makes us feel uncomfortable.

## **Declarations**

### **Ethics approval**

Ethical review was not considered necessary in alignment with the University of Toronto's guidance on the conduct of ethical research.

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## AI-generated content

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