

Cameron Hoffman  
Concordia University, Concordia University Libraries, Montreal, QC  
Sarah Polkinghorne  
University of Alberta, Alberta

## Discourse, identity, practice: Analyzing instruction librarians' conversations about information literacy and the social Web

**Abstract:** Librarians communicate regularly on the Information Literacy Instruction (ILI-L) listserv about integrating the Social Web in their library instruction practices. Critical discourse analysis of these postings reveals a concern with control, which makes mastery of these technologies a priority, along with a fear in the profession of ceding pedagogical authority.

**Résumé :** Les bibliothécaires discutent régulièrement sur la liste de diffusion Information Literacy Instruction (ILI-L) de l'intégration du web social aux pratiques de formation documentaire de leur bibliothèque. Une analyse critique du discours de ces communications révèle une préoccupation par rapport au contrôle, faisant de la maîtrise de ces technologies une priorité, ainsi que la crainte d'une perte d'autorité pédagogique pour la profession.

What discourses inform, and are informed by, the conversations instruction librarians have about the relationship between information literacy and the social Web? Contemporary information literacy practices within post-secondary education have placed growing emphasis on integrating social Web applications such as blogs, wikis, media-sharing services, and social networking sites with the teaching of traditional research and library skills. Since 2006, the presenters have been examining the evolving relationship among the social Web, information literacy, and librarianship, with an eye to articulating what this relationship reveals about librarians' professional identities and practices. The key framework throughout the research has been critical discourse analysis, chosen for its ability to facilitate examination of the ways of thinking that underpin text and speech. This presentation will focus on results of the investigators' most recent project: an analysis of postings to the American Library Association's Information Literacy Instruction Discussion List, best known as ILI-L. Particularly, the presentation will examine the control-focused discourse that dominates the posting sample, particularly within discussions of teaching identity and practice. Throughout the 2000s, the practitioner literature surrounding the social Web (also known as "Web 2.0") focused on making libraries more attractive to users and promoting services such as reference assistance and specialized collections (e.g., Albanese 2006, Bell 2005, Chase 2007, Gordon & Stephens 2006, Hauser 2007). Information literacy has been a less prominent concern, although an emphasis on fusing it with the social Web has been referenced through such avenues as the decentralized "Library 2.0" movement (Levine 2006), which is based on an assumption that libraries require rebranding as sites of technological sophistication and relevance. Along pedagogical lines, the emerging concept of "Information Literacy 2.0" has most recently been explored by Špiranec and Zorica, who advocate a move away from traditional library instruction toward the teaching of social tagging issues, information evaluation, and considerations of privacy (2010).

Among practitioners, both in published literature and in informal venues, enthusiasts for the social Web seemed to outnumber detractors throughout the past decade. However, the

investigators' current findings reveal that practitioners' enthusiasm to integrate the social Web into information literacy practice is far from straightforward. While the social Web has the potential to enrich and expand librarians' conventional information literacy instruction, it also presents fundamental challenges to many librarians' teaching practices. In examined ILI-L conversations, many librarians' statements demonstrate a tension between two conflicting impulses: enthusiasm to implement new technology and reluctance to adopt a learner-centred classroom. This tension, as viewed through a discursive lens, can be understood as a manifestation of a discourse of control within which instruction librarians function.

Indeed, this discourse of control was predominant in the investigators' analysis of the more than 350 ILI-L messages that comprised the research sample. This discourse, like all discourses, is multi-faceted, and both affects and is affected by its subjects. That libraries are founded in systems of control is no controversial statement: maintaining order and organization are among libraries' most traditional preoccupations, so it is not surprising that as institutions, libraries should perpetuate a powerful control discourse. Instruction librarians, as discursive subjects, frequently temper their enthusiasm for the social Web with control-oriented concerns. For example, in one ILI-L conversation, a librarian expresses a desire to implement a library wiki to encourage participation. At the same time, she expresses a conflicting concern, articulated as fear of the implications of not fully controlling the resource and monitoring who contributes to it. The control discourse manifests itself in such concerns, and also in librarians' descriptions of their classroom practices, which tend to utilize tool-focused procedures and scripts, rather than reflecting nuanced understandings of pedagogy, including the constructivist pedagogy that often aligns with classroom use of the social Web. Thus, the ILI-L sample also reflects the influence of the control discourse on librarians' identities as teachers; the researchers noted librarians' prioritization of the controlled implementation and mastery of new technological tools within instructional practice. By contrast, librarians focused much less on authentically exploring the pedagogical potential of these tools as part of a teaching process.

The investigators have employed critical discourse analysis because of its capacity to examine institutionalized talk and interpretative practices amongst librarians (Talja 1999). The emphasis on using discourse analysis to reveal and better understand "practices" is intentional. It enables a focus on how librarians relate on the social and interactional level and how their perceptions of information literacy and the social Web illustrate their sense of teaching role. Critical discourse analysis is a means of exploring the information practices that construct librarian professional identity rather than a discrete set of information-seeking behaviours or uses (Savolainen 2007; McKenzie 2003). This kind of analysis is informed by, rather than bound to, Foucauldian conceptions of archaeology, with its orientation toward discursive description, and genealogy, with its relationship to discursive interpretation (Budd 2006; Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983).

The analysis of ILI-L postings augments the investigators' earlier work, which involved a critical discourse analysis of published literature about information literacy and the social Web (Hoffman & Polkinghorne 2007). That study revealed a predominant marketing/consumer discourse, in which librarians were positioned as service providers, patrons as consumers, and new technologies as tools to improve the public image of libraries, to increase usage statistics and circulation, or to help libraries "compete" with

Google and Wikipedia. In the literature sampled in that study, an education-oriented discourse constructing libraries as sites of learning, patrons as learners, and librarians as teachers was less apparent.

Findings from the ILI-L analysis reveal that many librarians are now integrating the social Web meaningfully and creatively into instructional work. However, this integration is not straightforward, but rather fraught with tension between the pedagogical potential of social Web technologies and librarians' conventional roles within a predominant discourse of control. This presentation will uniquely integrate diverse topics — the social Web and information literacy — into an examination of the nature and evolution of professional identity and practice.

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