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DEVELOPING CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: LITERARY THEORY, PROCESS PEDAGOGY, AND INFORMATION LITERACY

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With societal well-being so dependent on how its citizens find, review, and use information, institutions must help students become information literate, in the fullest sense of the term.

– David Breneman (qtd. in Breivik)

In an October 5, 2016 article in *Politico* about a vice-presidential debate, Jack Shafer wrote that “[a]nytime a network microphone is live, disinformation can pour into the nation’s living rooms” and “in campaign 2016 . . . disinformation efforts have become rampant” (1). Shafer’s observation speaks to the issue of dis/misinformation that has plagued educators with the rise of the alt-right and through the election and into the presidency of Donald Trump, with “alternative facts” becoming a popular term in the American cultural imaginary. A plethora of essays on combating fake news and teaching students how to recognize it have appeared in *The Chronicle of Higher Ed*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and others. As part of its 2016 Presidential Inauguration Week, a panel held at the University of Mary Washington was titled “Higher Education in the Disinformation Age: Can America’s public liberal arts universities restore critical thinking and civility in public discourse?” These examples bring to light the urgency of recognizing critical thinking, civility in public discourse, distinguishing disinformation, as well as information literacy. This chapter focuses on developing critical consciousness in students by layering reflective processes of analysis and revision to teach students how to simultaneously challenge and reflect on the ever-shifting meaning of historicity. The larger implication of our argument about *how* to develop critical consciousness is that such a process not only makes students information literate—in that they can effectively locate, understand, and evaluate source information—but that this process can combat fake news and disinformation, thus initiating a more liberatory pedagogy that encourages responsible thoughtfulness and critical questioning. We emphasize the importance of three key terms in opening up a student’s critical aptitude from within the classroom: critical consciousness, information literacy, and process pedagogy—or a strong emphasis on the process of writing and rewriting as it includes sourcing

and assessing information. We borrow from Paulo Freire's definition of critical consciousness but locate this concept in our political present, building upon critical consciousness as the heightened skeptical approach one takes in assessing information in order to carefully evaluate and thoughtfully interrogate truth-based claims.

According to Freire, critical consciousness is a way of achieving an in-depth understanding and reading of the world and recognition of contradictions, or "apprehend[ing] the objective data of . . . reality (as well as the ties that link one datum to another) through reflection—not by reflex" (3). This leads to, as Freire emphasizes, "a deepened consciousness" in which students can "apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible to transformation" (85). We are, in particular, interested in Freire's emphasis on the combination of analyzing component parts in order to devise solutions, and the role reflection plays in dictating strategy. Critical consciousness is particularly concerned with the combination of reflective action and critical theorizing.

In our adaptive version of process pedagogy, critical consciousness is developed through the commensurate synchronous work of evaluating information, revising, assessing, and revisiting writing through self-reflexive analyses, peer commentary, and professor feedback.¹ We describe a pedagogy anchored by a scaffolded process of information literacy (IL) through which a learner achieves competence in digesting and using information through ongoing formative feedback during the writing and revision processes. Because IL is the understanding of how information is shaped, valued, and then communicated, this process of teaching forefronts the reflective finding of information. The reflective piece is especially important here, as, in connecting to Freire, it functions as the mode through which information is found, evaluated, and used. Transformation comes from reflecting *and* intervening. As students reflect on their processes, we teach them to actively seek and build their own intervention or original space in which to create new knowledge, perspectives, or arguments. Therefore, our process model moves from students working on a micro-level (to define and understand terms), to working with historical and background elements, to understanding the cultural and social level, and lastly to evaluating current research and integrating all previous levels (or working on a macro-level).

When educators talk about combating fake news or disinformation, we are talking about successfully teaching IL. Information literacy, as has been stated in various contexts since the emergence of the term in the 1970s, is an essential part of a well-informed twenty-first century citizenry,² and we argue that the concomitant, intersectional relationship between the three key activities of self-reflexive analyses, peer commentary, and professor feedback are essential for producing critically-minded students. In this chapter, we seek, through an engagement with composition, literature, and literary theory, to explore, in the current cultural and political moment, how to more comprehensively address and reinforce IL *as a writing process* and not a singular skill.

Our IL process model may be used in advanced literature classes, extending beyond the composition course where it is typically relegated. In this chapter, we compare the teaching of IL within an ecocritical literature course for non-English majors at a small, private university to the teaching of IL in a course focusing on contemporary literature with a feminist lens for English majors at a larger public two-year institution. We highlight the marked improvement in our layered IL

approaches, which centralize theoretical analysis, socio-historical context, and researched arguments, examining how the distinction between *skill* and *process* is central to our argument. Reflection, as integral to Freire's definition of critical consciousness, can bridge the teaching of information literacy as a skill to a process.

As literature professors, we are typically separated from rhetoric and composition scholarship (especially as it applies to IL research); however, in our respective institutions, we each teach both composition and upper-level literature seminars. The composition class is not only about writing; it is sometimes the singular source of teaching of IL, now a staple general education outcome at most colleges and universities and the root of the mis/disinformation onslaught. Despite the differences in our institutions (an open community college and a private, career-oriented four-year university), we have noticed the same issues concerning mis/disinformation: students often do not question the information they receive (they are passive receivers) and because the curriculum within both of our institutions treats IL as a skill, students often lack the means to adequately question and critically assess sources. We cannot assume students are equipped with the critical skills necessary to navigate an increasingly flooded and oppressive, dis-informative media climate.

If IL is about source culling and assessment, critical thinking, and evaluation, or even, as we will explore further, the development of what Freire terms critical consciousness, it is more aptly described and taught as a process that centralizes reflection than the skill that we too often treat it as. By process, we mean to not only invoke reflection as Freire does, but layered steps in which students build upon and revise work from earlier stages. Treating IL as a skill has caused, as Margaret Artman, Erica Friscaro-Pawłowski, and Robert Monge have stated, the common practice of “limit[ing] lessons in information literacy to ‘one-shot’ library instruction sessions” (93). This is indicative not only of IL's categorization as a skill and not a process, but of a neglected skill at that.³ However, as Diane VanderPol, Jeanne M. Brown, and Patricia Iannuzzi have argued, IL allows students “to determine the nature of information needed to solve a problem, find targeted information and evaluate its reliability and usefulness, apply and analyze information to create new knowledge” and, perhaps most importantly, “function with an understanding of the ethical and financial contexts of their information use” (12). Process theory allows us to rethink the skills approach to IL. For example, integrating aspects of process theory would make peer-response and instructor feedback an essential part of learning IL, forcing students to confront their biases and actively revise their missteps throughout their research.⁴

For Freire, the use of reflective action and critical theorizing of a process prevents one from being a passive recipient of knowledge. Freire addresses how process is vital to engagement with the world, especially when it comes to absorbing and processing information:

As men amplify their power to perceive and respond to suggestions and questions arising in their context, and increase their capacity to enter into dialogue with not only other men but with their world, they become “transitive.” Their interests and concerns now extend beyond the simple vital sphere. Transitivity of consciousness makes man “permeable.” (13-14)

Freire's insistence that transformation is born of being in dialogue with others furthers the significance of consistent peer and instructor feedback throughout the research and writing process.

Further, transformation also comes from reflection and intervention, integral pieces to sourcing, assessing, and then implementing information in one's writing. This chapter reclaims process theory as it functions as an effective model for centering IL in literature classrooms in a critical political moment. Indeed, we suggest revisiting process pedagogy—and therefore centralizing student voices and texts—as a means of combating the current onslaught of mis/disinformation. The question that this chapter seeks to answer is: how can process pedagogy be used to combat fake news, skewed, or disinformation? We assert that a process writing model is still serviceable to composition (and significantly, English and literature, as exemplified in this chapter) classrooms in other ways. Conceptualizing writing as a process emphasizes active, critical engagement.

Shifting away from the process model, scholars have argued for an approach that eschews a uniform process through which IL is taught and implemented. Deeply informed by poststructuralism, post-process theory argues that teaching writing as a system is impossible because “writing is public; writing is interpretive; and writing is situated” (Kent, qtd. in Breuch 133). While we agree that writing is culturally, socially, and historically “situated” and “interpretive,” we argue that several elements of the process model are useful to IL, especially given the need for students to navigate the current climate of American media and politics—ever-changing and increasingly complex. Process can also be extended to other disciplines outside of first-year writing, as we will address later in this chapter with specific upper-level literature and theory classes.⁵ Teaching students to understand the myriad ways in which texts are shaped by contemporary discursive formations helps connect them to the process of literacy while showing them how to become more thoughtful, critical consumers of information.

Treating IL as a process in which, to draw on Freire, students enter into dialogue with information *and* each other as they reflect on said information and thereby become transitive requires that IL be taught beyond the first-year. We suggest that IL be “integrated into multiple, contextual classroom sessions”—not just composition and not just as a means of assisting students with the procedures associated with paper-writing (Artman, Frisicaro-Pawlowski, and Monge 93). Information literacy must be extended into other classes and disciplines. After all, IL “is a critical element of the skills needed to become an informed, productive citizen, able to take an active role in one's community” (McMillan and O'Neil 31). To combat misinformation effectively and prepare students for the obligations of citizenship, educators must focus on and teach the importance of IL to students, who, in seeing it treated as a skill taught in a single class period spent in the library, find it “only useful or valuable if tied to that well-worn (and ill-formed) genre, the academic research paper” (Artman, et al. 96). Extending its relevance and emphasizing process will change the way students view and use IL.

Our IL process model is a layered approach to research with built-in peer-review and reflection activities. As we have argued, reflection is part of what differentiates the process model from others and is the means to, by Freire's definition, the actualization of critical consciousness in students. The layers of our model are broad enough that they may be adopted for disciplines besides literature or English Studies. A basic outline of the model includes:

- General: This includes initial defining of terms (importantly from multiple sources),

language/jargon, places, and people associated with a text or topic. This is the most basic level of research and gives instructors an opportunity to demonstrate effective use of Google, Google Scholar, and other heavily-relied upon (and riddled with pitfalls) internet search engines. This first phase then leads to a short reflection exercise on being critical of internet sources (in this first step, by comparing and contrasting differences in the information obtained from multiple places) and asking students to rhetorically analyze their bibliographies for social and political bias.

- **Background/Historical:** This phase asks students to build upon initial research (which may have been revised after the short rhetorical analysis was completed) to develop a historical context. At this stage, peer-review is introduced. Students also use this phase to investigate how to confirm the factuality of all sources.
- **Cultural and Social:** This phase is a more in-depth and specific approach that still relies on the phases before it. In a literature course, this allows students to explore more specific elements of a text. Peer-feedback can be used at this stage as well.
- **Current Research:** This is the most nuanced level. This is the gathering and assessing of the most up-to-date research on a text or topic and is premised upon theoretical literacy and the integration of all research from the previous levels. Students then construct a narrative of their research process also subject to peer- (and certainly instructor-) review. The narrative is the key approach here, as it is centralized on an account of the research process and not the research itself.

Integrating Process Pedagogy and IL

A great deal of recent research in the field of composition and rhetoric examines the ways in which IL should become a more integral component to first-year writing, thus moving away from, for example, the “one-shot library session” and embedding a more rigorous literacy approach into the course structure.⁶ This research has limitations. For instance, recently, *WPA: Writing Program Administration* and *Composition Forum* have published pieces on IL and writing curricula, but such articles do not go beyond the use of IL in first-year writing. Additionally, more recent scholarship on combining IL with writing instruction or first-year composition programs often addresses particular changes or collaborations done at the authors’ singular universities. For example, Anne-Marie Deitering and Sara Jameson’s essay, “Step by Step through the Scholarly Conversation: A Collaborative Library/Writing Faculty Project to Embed Information Literacy and Promote Critical Thinking in First Year Composition at Oregon State University” and Jennifer Fielding et al.’s “Integrated Information Literacy and Student Outcomes in Foundational First-Year Writing” both discuss specific work done at individual institutions. In other words, such work doesn’t attend to *pedagogical practices*, but rather collaborative efforts and localized models. Rolf Norgaard has written that “it is nothing short of surprising how little the field [of rhetoric and composition] has written about information literacy and library collaboration, especially if one is looking for more than anecdotal reports of local practice” (125).

If we attribute IL solely to librarians, we effectively take any onus off of faculty in the classroom to also teach IL. However, even some recent scholarship continues to limit the expansion of IL. Sheila Corral's 2017 essay "Crossing the Threshold: Reflective Practice in Information Literacy Development" examines how teaching librarians may use reflective activities and practices "to enable learners to think critically about their IL abilities" (23), again assigning the teaching of IL only to librarians. Annemaree Lloyd's "Information Literacy and Literacies of Information" theorizes IL as an academic discipline unto itself and as a "practice that is shaped by the social site, promoting certain knowledges and enactments" (101). But this essay serves to further sever IL from the myriad academic disciplines that it ought to be integrated into, as does James Elmborg's "Lessons from Forty Years as a Literacy Educator: An Information Literacy Narrative," by not addressing the role that instructors play in reinforcing and using IL methods taught initially by librarians. Elmborg's work focuses, again, on the notion that IL is the job of librarians to teach. If students are truly to understand IL as a process with relevance in every discipline and relevance to them as citizens, it must extend beyond first-year writing *and* be reinforced continually in other writing-intensive and upper-level courses.

Teaching Process IL within Literature Courses

As professors and scholars of literature, we build IL into the study of history, literature, *and* writing, especially in the upper-level literature and theory courses; it is typically assumed that students have mastered IL by this point and no longer need reinforcement. We begin with the tacit acknowledgement that writing is a social act with deep ethical implications. As explained by McMillan and O'Neil, "social literacy—the ability to understand and participate socially in a complex and interdependent social world—is concerned with the empowerment of the social and ethical self" (38). Our literature classes, instead of being centered on research papers, centralize the process of IL, partially by way of walking students through an examination of textual analysis through historical, cultural, social, and environmental lenses, and partially by shifting the assignments from several papers to smaller IL processes and reflections, as mentioned earlier. Building a rigorous process of IL around this model connects students both to the act of reading and writing. We follow Edward Said's claim in "The World, the Text, and the Critic" that "texts have ways of existing, both theoretical and practical, that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence are worldly" (4), a claim not dissimilar to Freire's examination of critical consciousness. Indeed, we argue that one's critical consciousness is sophisticated by their heightened understanding of the "worldliness" of texts. Whether it be literature or media news, students can begin to understand the ways in which information is deeply shaped by myriad worldly discursive formations; by creating an intersection between language, culture, and society, students become more active, critically minded agents within the process of information production.

Lastly, creating a relationship between student and text is the most integral component of IL. In an age of mis/disinformation, it is essential that we reinforce the work in composition and

rhetoric that considers IL central to the teaching of writing and looks for ways to extend it across the curriculum.⁷ This, of course, reinforces the relationship IL has to critical consciousness. Cultivating an intersectional relationship between student and text is also the first step in teaching students to care deeply about their own literacy. In our classes, we begin by developing a theoretical paradigm upon which the course operates. From that orientation, we scaffold information slowly through an interweaving of theory, textual background, history, culture, and contemporary research. The research paper is built into this concomitant IL process, a pedagogical strategy that falls in line with a great deal of composition studies.⁸ We emphasize with students the ways in which the process of research is integral to understanding texts and relating to the society and culture that ultimately produced them. As Artman, Frisicaro-Pawlowski, and Mongue argue, “[b]y teaching research as a single and discrete unit disconnected from rhetorical concerns, we powerfully influence the ways students come to understand and engage information” (96). In other words, research is an integral component of the ways in which we teach IL and literacy assessment is continual and built into this pedagogical model. As students develop a more nuanced, complex understanding of language, context, and writing, they learn to become more rigorous producers, consumers, and researchers of information.

As we have begun to map out, our IL process model offers a layered, multimodal approach that intentionally teaches students how to better evaluate information. One could make the claim that our current media literacy crisis stems from a passified relationship to information in general—and helping students care more about the information they receive can provide a stepping stone towards sifting out false or inadequate news. Teaching students, first and foremost, the degree to which our contemporary media landscape has created a more fragmented body politic with individuals more isolated from one another than ever before is one of the first steps towards helping them develop a stronger awareness about information dissemination. Engaging students from within a myriad of writing forms, analysis, research, and projects can help coax students out of their isolated, individualized media bubbles and teach students the invaluable need to question, analyze, and actively engage all forms of information.

In the sections that follow, we discuss teaching ecocritical literacy at a small, private, university for non-English majors and the ways in which IL is integrated into this class. Following our discussion of ecocriticism and literature, we compare the methodology for teaching IL at a larger public institution through a contemporary feminist approach. Although our university systems and student demographics are quite different, we have developed very similar approaches for layering in process pedagogy through the study of literature, culture, theory and criticism. In both of our courses, we teach IL through an integrative process model of academic engagement that centralizes theoretical inquiry, literacy, socio-historical context, and research. We provide students with the tools they need to revise their writing so as to accurately compose thoughtful, well-versed arguments that are crafted around a continual unfurling of theoretical, historical, cultural, and literary layering. Using the model we have developed, the following sections offer two ways to teach IL through literature classes.

An Ecocritical Approach

Teaching students ecocritical literacy within a quickly paced trimester schedule at a small private university with a group of non-majors has its challenges. Most students are either disinterested in ecocriticism, have little experience with environmental writing, or lack the information needed to fully engage in an in-depth analysis of our environmental crisis. The key is to instruct students about the value, and need, of complex analysis and literacy, while keeping each unit distinctive and manageable. In order to successfully develop an interdisciplinary ecocritical seminar around process pedagogy, the course is anchored around revision, theoretical inquiry, literary analysis, and research. As ecocritic Ken Hiltner emphasizes, “the humanities, such as literary study... have a major role to play in our shared challenge of forging an environmentally better future” (xii). This, of course, is the challenge of process pedagogy: teaching students the major role they each have in “forging an environmentally better future” through continual revision, analysis, and writing. The design of the course is built on Freire’s concept of “consciousness building” through a layering of interdisciplinary scholarship that moves from ecocriticism to news media to literature to a deeper researched topical environmental analysis. The students’ final assessment, an environmental magazine project portfolio, represents a revisionist culmination of their writing. The goal of the class is to help students realize their role in de-codifying erroneous or inaccurate environmental news while developing more sophisticated, thoughtful discursive analyses. As Cheryl Glotfelty argues, “ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment . . . all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it” (122-123). Beginning with this premise, students are taught the ways in which writing and language are distinctly connected to the natural world. Through an interdisciplinary layering of environmental topical analyses, students learn the invaluable ways in which environmental writing and discourse are deeply connected to their own agency.

Applying the IL process model looks like the following:

- General: At the beginning of the course, students are introduced to the definition and understanding of ecocriticism and its broader implications as a means of analyzing literature, culture, and discursive perceptions around the environment. Here, students also begin to learn the modalities and frameworks through which to philosophically examine the world through an ecocritical lens. This gives students a basic context for understanding the theoretical framework for the many ways they will apply it in the course.
- Background/Historical: This element is continuously built into the course as students consistently explore ecocriticism as a malleable, ongoing framework through which contemporary environmental issues—and problematic/flawed representations of those issues within media texts—may be examined and continuously revised. Students are also introduced to a representative ecocritical author in order to situate the theoretical paradigm vis-a-vis a literary text. In this particular class, students learn about Margaret Atwood’s autobiographical background and the specific themes she examines in *Oryx and Crake* as representative of our current historical moment.
- Cultural and Social: Here students understand the actual lived implications of ecocriticism

as a cultural and social movement. In other terms, students learn that ecocritical thinking is a theoretical paradigm predicated on social change, thus revealing the stakes involved in applying this theory to studies of the environment.

- **Current Research:** This final layer asks students to connect the theoretical ideas learned from within the class to contemporary environmental issues alongside media representation of those issues. Throughout the course, students embark on contemporary research, continually scaffolding in real-time concerns alongside core course material. Because research is built into the structural paradigm of the class, the students understand ecocriticism, and its ongoing importance, as an ongoing reflexive, critical framework.

In the first unit of the class, students analyze, critique, and respond to environmental news media, while learning about the broad understanding of ecocriticism. In order to track their progress, students develop and maintain an online environmental journal and follow their classmates. This online journal gives students the opportunity to assess, respond, revise, and reconstruct their ideas throughout the term as they learn more complex theoretical, cultural, and literary ideas. In this unit, students compose blog posts responding to specific environmental news articles while engaging with their peers' writing. Revision is built into the curriculum as each class begins with an analysis of student writing. As students analyze and critique news media rhetoric, ecocriticism is introduced as an overarching theoretical framework.

Once introduced to the material, students are required to revise their blogs, integrating ecocriticism into their analysis. This multimodal revisionist and theoretical approach helps students learn how to effectively sift out problematic information while introducing a new theoretical paradigm into their vernacular. Their final assignment in this unit is to compose an ecocritical news article, incorporating the language of ecocritical theory into their discourse. By this time in the term, students have learned how to comment on and critique problematic media representations of the environment and have the opportunity to compose their own media editorials on their blog sites and, eventually, their magazines.

Following their news media unit, students begin reading a work of environmental fiction that gives students an accessible yet complex means through which to examine ecocriticism and many contemporary environmental concerns. Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, a novel that synthesizes environmental catastrophe, Western scientific reasoning, and human agency in a post-apocalyptic narrative, provides a space for students to refine these rather complex ideas through a creative medium, teaching them that "literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather plays a part in an immensely global system, in which energy, matter, *and ideas* interact" (Glotfelty 123). This multilayered approach not only teaches students the importance of literary studies from within a deeply fragmented socio-political world, but it also instructs them how best to become active agents within the process. As students read and analyze *Oryx and Crake*, they are taught more complex ecocritical theories and continually compose blog analyses of the novel, incorporating each theoretical layer as they write. Each of the students' blogs intentionally builds towards the unit's final assignment, where they are expected to compose an analysis of the novel using a combination of these theoretical frameworks. Again, throughout this unit, student blogs are

continually subject to peer revision both outside and inside the classroom, and are graded on their revisions. Once students have composed their final essay for the unit, they have the opportunity to incorporate revisionist suggestions for their magazine portfolio.

In their final unit, students embark on a research project that is synthesized around an area of interest derived from their environmental news media article tracking and topical issues discussed in *Oryx and Crake*. Within this section of the course, students are taught how to engage with peer-reviewed articles alongside searching for relevant topics via Google. At this point in the term, students have been writing and revisiting ecocritical frameworks from within their blogs and now begin to synthesize these paradigms into a deeper research analysis. The goal of the final research assignment is to incorporate an ecocritical analysis of a contemporary environmental issue while simultaneously pointing out the ways in which mainstream media news fails to cover the breadth and depth of these issues. As students compile their blogging research trail, they simultaneously build their magazine projects, revising shorter pieces of writing while layering in more nuance and theory. Their final environmental magazine assesses their overall revisionist incorporation, theoretical nuance, research depth, topical relevance, and environmental purpose.

A course anchored around ecocriticism certainly lends itself to consciousness-raising. But this is not always self-evident to students, and it is the role of the professor to teach students the value of critical thinking in an age of mis/disinformation, especially in terms of environmental issues. In this respect, process IL offers an invaluable pedagogical modality through which to engage students in every step of the process, from media news to literary study to short publishable blog writing. Helping students realize the value of critical literacy while enforcing their own revisionist writing process is a crucial means through which to teach students the value of their discursive contributions. Comparative learning outcomes data from two different course assessments reveals a marked improvement in student literary and awareness when integrated learning is layered throughout the term. As the data reveal, continually reinforcing revision and response throughout the breadth of the seminar, while methodically layering in more sophisticated theoretical frameworks, bolsters student proficiency—as opposed to a more antiquated model that tests proficiency via a localized final comprehensive seminar essay. In the spring of 2016, for instance, this comprehensive researched analysis was the modality tested for outcomes assessment. In this version of the course, students conducted research on a topical area related to ecocriticism and literature and were required to integrate peer-reviewed research into an analysis of their chosen primary text. In this course assessment, of the fifteen students, sixty-five percent measured proficient and six percent measured near proficient. In spring of 2017, the data reveal a significant improvement in literacy. Shorter revised blog assignments combined with a researched analysis and the final environmental magazine portfolio were all used to assess this outcome. Learning outcomes data from this term jumped from sixty-five percent to eighty percent proficient, with five percent near proficient. Student evaluations in spring of 2017 revealed a positive response to the material, notably remarking on their connection to the material and vested interest in a topic with which they were deeply unfamiliar. Holding one another accountable for their writing via blogging, for instance, helped students care more deeply about their engagement with the topic, while the final portfolio provided a more vested interest in student revision throughout

the term. And perhaps most importantly in a topic as critical as environmental awareness, students revealed the ways their uncritical assumptions were deeply informed by a lack of caring about media news related to the topic. An interdisciplinary theoretical scaffolding of IL throughout the course, coupled with consistent revisionist discursive responses, helped students transition from a position of disinterest to one of active awareness and critical engagement.

A Contemporary Feminist Approach

Our second classroom example of negating a skills-based approach to IL comes from a contemporary literature course taught to second-year students at a community college. This class often has English majors in it, but is not totally comprised of them, as the course fills a diversity general education requirement for all students. In this course, students read five or six novels, and with each text, IL is presented, taught, then reinforced as a process. Similar to the previous example of an ecocritical class, several levels of IL are put forward, each building on the previous and culminating with a thorough and full contextualization of the text being studied. The different levels of IL used in this course (as enumerated earlier) are essentially various research contexts as they pertain to literature, but are broad enough that they could be adopted for other literature courses or even other disciplines entirely. These different contexts could then unite approaches to IL across all programs at a college, providing an effective means of constant reinforcement. Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* is a popular and well-received text in this course. Applying the IL process model to it looks like the following:

- **General:** Defining terms associated with the text, this initial level introduces students to feminism in literature, popular conceptions of this novel and Plath herself, as well as the association between Plath's life and the text. This provides the first opportunity for students to delve into the autobiographical element and determine just how much of the text can be attributed to Plath's own life. Students also explore the genre of the bildungsroman here or the question of Plath as a feminist. This provides basic context for the novel and an underpinning for the next, deeper levels of the IL process.
- **Background/Historical:** While continuing to investigate autobiographical elements, this next level also has students explore the backdrop of the Cold War and forge connections between that and autobiography. Here students move into more specificity, for example, looking at second-wave feminism and how it differs from other waves.
- **Cultural and Social:** Here students get into the American 1950s, its relationship to feminism, as well as specific social roles and stereotypes for women in this era, as are grappled with within the text. Having the historical references fleshed out, students then move into particular cultural references from the novel, such as *Women's Day Magazine*, *Mademoiselle*, Smith College, the treatment and perception of mental illness in the 1950s, and others.
- **Current Research:** As described before, this final level asks students to not only look at and paraphrase the most recent, interdisciplinary work on the novel, but also display theoretical literacy and the merging of all previous levels of research. One assignment that easily brings this research together is a context and concept map, wherein students create visual

representations of the links between the terms associated with the novel, the historical context, cultural references, and other elements. This encourages them to forge connections between seemingly disparate aspects of the text while supporting and defending such connections through the application of research, information, and citation.

What distinguishes this model from other traditional approaches in literary study and in composition is that the emphasis is moved away from a research paper (or final product) and on to smaller, peer-reviewed assignments that force students to consider their research processes and whether they have completed them and assessed their sources in objective, unbiased ways.⁹ For example, annotated bibliographies can be used at any level of the process described above. Students can also list and arrange sources based on assessment of bias or agenda; or students might chart sources based on their relationship to sources discovered at other levels of the process, allowing them to explore intertextuality. Information literacy “has evolved to include an array of content and skills that includes the ethical use of information, contextual analysis, an understanding of information organization and accessibility structures, formats, and systems” (Fielding, et al. 107). A model like the one described above—particularly the use of it to create smaller assignments based on contextualizing sources, putting them in conversation, and working to develop a holistic understanding of a text through such research—becomes a necessary process for students.

Because all of the novels in the class incorporate issues of gender and gender identity, feminism creates a critical and thematic base for the course. Students initially explore feminism through literary theory, before we begin reading fiction. As students move from one novel to the next, they see continuity through the feminist lens and develop an interpretive framework that also provides a vocabulary on which to draw for literary analysis. Feminism is engaged here in order to demonstrate to students the overarching theme of gender in our identities and our culture, as elucidated by literary texts; this connects to the Freirean concept of consciousness-raising. Because all literary theory “examine[s] the relations between writers, texts, and the world,” (Glotfelty 123), students are connected to a process of inquiry about the world around them and its reflection in the fiction that students study in this class. As Stacey Sowards and Valerie Renegar have written, “For many feminists and other social critics, consciousness-raising is central to the process of creating a critical awareness of our culture” (535). In other words, within this IL process model, literary theory lays the groundwork for being critical and for posing thoughtful questions and is reinforced by the various ways that IL is then used throughout the course. In the ecocritical approach, students focus on what it means to be human in the context of an ever-changing planet and how that affects their reception of information, while in the feminist approach, students are taught to focus on the construction of the self and gender identity and how these influence the way they take in information. Students start the course by thinking about agency through gender identity, about the process of teaching and learning gender performativity. Students look at the work of Judith Butler, for example, who offers “a more radical use of the doctrine of constitution that takes the social agent as an *object* rather than the subject of constitutive acts” (Butler 519). Because Butler ultimately questions the extent to which people constitute themselves and their gender identity, students are led to question what and how the information they receive develops their identities instead. Using Butler, students can then investigate

other sources on gender identity, and construct visual webs of how their various sources define and explain identity (as one example). Seeing a visual of source overlap, students begin to understand the importance of IL and critical thinking.

Though it may not seem that using process IL in literature classes is a way to negate the plague of mis/disinformation, we have found that the aforementioned relationship between world and text is significant in this regard. Smaller assignments, while aligning better with IL as process model, have also made it easier to collect learning outcomes assessment for the course. For example, in the fall of 2016, the research paper was the sole assessment tool for measuring the IL course objective: conduct effective research on the chosen topic, effectively integrating primary texts and library and internet sources. That semester, a course section of twenty students was seventy percent proficient and five percent near proficient in this area. In the fall of 2017, several smaller assignments, such as an annotated bibliography, formal peer feedback on that assignment, as well as a content map, in addition to the research paper were used to assess this outcome. Proficiency increased to eighty-seven percent, with six percent near proficient. In student reflections on the IL process assignments in the fall of 2017, they reported that some of their initial assumptions had been refuted by fully delving into the material. Conducting research on a topic like feminism, which students often assume they understand and know, gives them a deeper and more nuanced understanding, which lends itself to the idea that they ought to continue interrogating terminology and their established notions. In other words, they find that culling additional sources or assessing their perceptions against the information obtained from scholarly research results in deeper and fuller comprehension. The value of critical theory in the context of IL is that it forces students to question the construction of their subjectivity and their place in the world, making their processing and assessing of received information personal and necessary to an understanding of their communities and the world. Ecocriticism and feminism are only two examples of literary theories that may be used to open the door to imparting the value of IL to students in various disciplines and in real-world contexts.

Conclusion

This chapter has put forth a pedagogical model that integrates literary study, theory, and IL in order to reinforce the work that students begin in composition courses. It is our contention that teaching IL as a skill in one college-level course does not do enough to help students master the ever-important outcomes of IL. Instead, we assert that IL ought to be treated as a process that can be fortified and cemented in other courses and disciplines outside of English. The process model can and should be extended to IL at this crucial moment in the onslaught of fake news and disinformation. Information literacy should be treated as an essential process in every course and discipline.

In reassessing the IL modality, our pedagogical model calls for a shifting of the ways in which literacy is actualized from within the classroom. By facilitating a deep connection between student and text, we emphasize the importance of engaging students from a multitude of theoretical, historical, and literary angles. If students can begin to develop a relationship with the material and perceive the ways in which they are active agents from within the process of information dissemination, they will

be less apt to uncritically internalize fake media messages. As humanities scholars, we are well aware of how “media influence our understandings of ourselves and the social world in profound ways that are often unrecognized” (Ouellette 1). Teaching students to become aware of these unseen and often “unrecognized” discursive power relations, however, is the key to developing a sense of critical consciousness in students’ minds. In an age in which fake news has become a national epidemic, it’s critical to instruct students that literacy isn’t just a measurable skill but an essential tool to their own agency in a world rife with duplicitous and egregious media messages. As educators in this age of disinformation, we have a responsibility to our students to teach them *how* to think critically while becoming active agents in their own education. Facilitating an intersectional relationship between critical thinking and textual analysis is the most crucial stepping stone in fostering an audience of student learners who care about the world and their places within it.

Notes

1. The method of IL as a process in this chapter is reinforced by the ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, particularly in the section, "Information Creation as a Process." For more information: <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework#process>.

2. See, for example, the 1974 report for the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science by Paul G. Zurkowski, in which the term "information literacy" was defined, and the 2005 recommendations from the UNESCO-sponsored Information Literacy Meeting of Experts. In 2009, then President Obama declared October National Information Literacy Awareness Month. Proclamation No. 8429, 2009 stated, "...we must also learn the skills necessary to acquire, collate, and evaluate information for any situation." See also Eric Leake's chapter in this collection.

3. See Nicole Allensworth's chapter in this collection for more on IL and the role of librarians and IL in combating disinformation.

4. Our two institutions are good examples of this. At both, information literacy is addressed in a single library session in the first-year composition course. While the research librarians at both institutions offer to do research and information literacy sessions in other courses and disciplines, they report less than ten instructors taking advantage of such offerings in the 2016-17 academic year. Our institutions are hardly the only examples of this. See Margaret Atman, Erica Friscaro-Pawlowski, and Robert Monge's "Not Just One Shot: Extending the Dialogue about Information Literacy in Composition Classes" in which they discuss the prevalence of composition programs being too "frequently responsible for teaching basic research writing" and how it is "still common practice to limit lessons in information literacy to 'one-shot' library instruction sessions" (93).

5. Current research on extending IL instruction focuses solely on composition courses (see, for example, Leslie Sult and Vicki Mills's essay "A Blended Method for Integrating Information Literacy Instruction into English Composition Classes" in *Reference Services Review*). While extending IL into other disciplines entirely is outside of the scope of this chapter, we are suggesting here an easy bridge to advanced literature courses as reinforcement of what students are taught in first-year composition.

6. See, for example, Rolf Norgaard's "Writing Information Literacy: Contributions to a Concept" in *Reference and User Services Quarterly*.

7. See, for example, Laura Brady, Nathalie Singh-Corcoran, Jo Ann Dadisman, and Kelly Diamond's "A Collaborative Approach to Information Literacy: First-Year Composition, Writing Center, and Library Partnerships at West Virginia University" in *Composition Forum* or Barbara J. D'Angelo and Barry M. Maid's "Moving Beyond Definitions: Implementing Information Literacy Across the Curriculum" in *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*.

8. See Lee Nickoson and Mary P. Sheridan's *Writing Studies Research in Practice: Methods and Methodologies*, a collection that examines research and writing from myriad perspectives and examines the commensurate relationship between systematic, reflective research and literacy as integral to student engagement.

9. We emphasize a move away from the literature courses culminating in a research paper not because research should be detached from the writing of papers, but because it should have value

outside of that context as well. It is also a long-standing tradition that graded work in literature classes solely be comprised of research papers. Moving research into other mediums emphasizes its importance outside of that assignment and outside of the classroom.

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