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Chapter 3

Academic Literacies as Ecology

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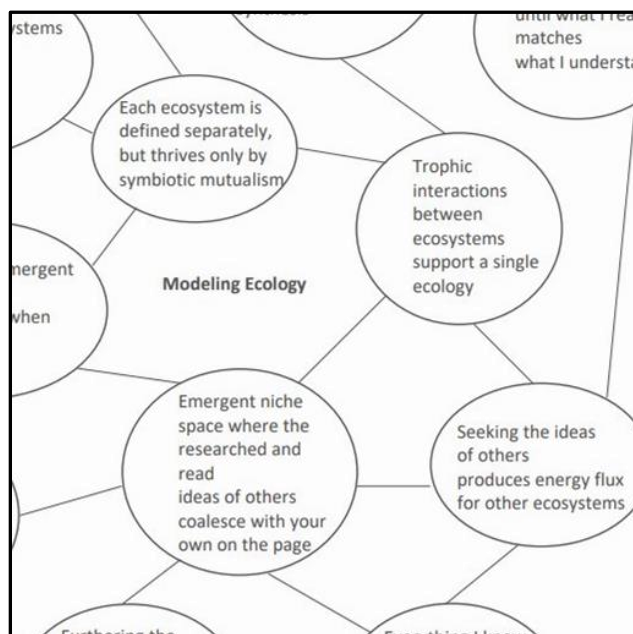


Image based on poem by Wyatt Heimbichner Goebel

About the Author

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Abstract

Although many library scholars and some compositionists have issued reasoned and persistent calls for an integrated approach to research and writing instruction, support for these academic literacies remains structurally siloed. Scholars in our home disciplines challenge these siloes with strong logic along with examples of locally driven, project-based collaborations between libraries, writing courses, and/or writing centers, but these collaborations are scarce and exhibit little staying power. Further, they seldom include support for the orphan literacy: reading. In this chapter, I present rationale for a new paradigm acknowledging academic literacies as one united ecology. In this chapter, I echo forward-thinking scholars in our home disciplines by proposing that research-reaching-writing become a merged ecosystem within the academic literacies ecology, and I further propose that a natural consequence to this paradigm includes uniting academic support, communities of practice, and disciplinary scholarship. I also suggest ways practitioners can exert bottom-up change pressure on seemingly intractable institutional and disciplinary structures. To that end, I provide principles and practices for professionals to “leverage small wins” (Meyerson, 2001; Weick, 1984) on the way to a systemic innovation: literacies as ecology.

Keywords: academic literacies, library instruction, writing centers, writing instruction, reading instruction, academic support programs, change leadership, pedagogical innovation

Studio Assistant (SA): What brings you to the Studio today?

Visitor (V): I just want to see if my education paper makes sense.

SA: Great! What part are you most concerned with?

V: Seems like the conclusion is kind of...well, I don't really have one.

SA: Let's look. Oh, your paper is on multiple intelligences; I've always been interested in that topic. Hm, I see this last citation is from "freeresearchpaper.com."

V: Is that cited correctly? I'm using MLA.

SA: The formatting is spot on. I'm thinking about the source itself. Could we look at it together?

V: Sure, it's just a website with a paper on multiple intelligences. I need at least one web source, and this quote is exactly what I need to back up my argument.

—Transcript from a session in the former Writing Center

For most of my career, I smugly thought of writing as *the* primary literacy. Perhaps that's why when I facilitated the session glossed above, I barely addressed both the specious source and the visitor's proof-rather-than-inquiry agenda. Maybe it's understandable: my identity is grounded in Writing Studies (WS) and Writing Center Studies (WCS). Early career, I treated literacy as discrete and linear: first you research, then you read, then you write. I'm not sure if I thought other literacies didn't need to be taught or if I just thought someone else should teach them, but, sadly, in both my classrooms and the Writing Center, I held a very narrow sense of writing. I developed staff development curricula featuring theories of teaching and learning, composition, and WCS practice orthodoxies. All well and good. But even though I assigned tutors projects requiring primary and secondary research, I attended little to either their reading or secondary research processes. Tutors picked up my unenlightened ways. In

practice consultations using the above visitor's draft, they too ignored issues with reading, researching, and inquiry, and they missed literacy interdependencies, even in excruciatingly obvious areas like evaluating source perspectives, integrating source ideas, and quoting and citing. While I have always known good reading and research were crucial to good writing, somehow I didn't truly *know* it until I joined Western Libraries, where my Library Information Studies (LIS) colleagues helped me understand how gaps in writing always accompany gaps in reading and research. Embracing this connection made me gulp. The thought of learning new tricks daunted this old dog, but I knew I had to renovate my paradigm—and my practices.

Treating academic literacies as a single, interdependent ecology now resonates in ways the younger me couldn't imagine living with but the current me can't imagine living without. As units of an ecology, ecosystems rely on the symbiotic relationship between constituents so that all thrive. Whereas ecosystems are interactive collectives made up of biological actors and their non-biological contexts, ecologies are ecosystems writ large; that is, an ecology considers how an entire constellation of ecosystems works together symbiotically. In the same way ecosystems thrive best when what benefits one also benefits another, an entire ecology operates the same way: an ecology can be sustained only when the associated ecosystems are thriving. Although the ecology metaphor does not yet prevail in our home disciplines, some LIS and WS scholars have toyed with ecological metaphors. For instance, the Association of College & Research Libraries' (ACRL) *Frameworks* document calls information an ecosystem (2016, p. 7); other LIS scholars stop short of calling information literacy an ecosystem, but they use ecosystem vocabulary and imagery. Baker and Gladis (2016), for example, discuss

making teaching information literacy sustainable in a campus system, and Jacobson (2016) proposes a model for the “metaliterate learner” in information literacy, the diagram for which resembles an interconnected ecosystem¹. In his award-winning volume, *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future*, Asao Inoue (2015) introduces writing assessment as an ecology (I would argue he means *ecosystem*), which he proposes is made up of several interconnected elements. Both examples show how some scholars have begun thinking of literacies as systems. It’s a start I hope to take further. In this chapter, I cultivate a systemic view that moves us beyond nascent notions of literacy interdisciplinarity to a complete paradigm shift: *academic literacy*² as ecology. I also outline how students benefit when practitioners apprehend and support literacies as symbiotic and interdependent rather than discrete. Finally, I propose scholarly and disciplinary behaviors that would help practitioners usher in this new paradigm. Make no mistake: I’m calling for nothing short of a complete makeover in our home disciplines.

Literacy Connections in Library Scholarship

If I asked LIS, WS, and WCS scholars to represent academic literacies in a Venn diagram, I feel confident all would draw an overlap, particularly between research and writing. Scholars have analyzed this overlap through the uncanny parallels between information literacy and writing dispositions. In response to the outcomes’ movement in higher education (e.g., Sheridan, 1995), the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) and the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) independently

¹ See Figure A.1, which presents a visual of “The Metaliterate Learner” (Jacobson, 2016, p. 429).

² For this chapter, *academic literacy/literacies* will be used to represent the literacies necessary for critically engaged lifelong learning, including (but not limited to) critical, digital/multimodal, information, listening, metacognitive, multicultural, political, professional, quantitative, reading, scientific, speaking, visual, and writing.

adopted standards-based outcomes first and frameworks-based ones later. For the most part, neither organization references the other literacy; in fact, given the lack of shared publications, it's possible neither organization knew of the other's efforts. But in 2003 and 2004, writing studies' scholar Rolf Norgaard initiated bridging writing and research, publishing in a prominent LIS journal a conceptual approach for what he calls "writing information literacy" (2003) and a pedagogical approach for "writing information literacy in the classroom" (2004). Norgaard highlighted the common habits of mind students need to navigate these literacy processes as well as the common fight against the reductive perception among students and faculty that writing and researching are mechanistic skills rather than intellectually engaged, rhetorically informed knowledge-making pursuits. Although he says he could have called both pieces "writing *and* information literacy," Norgaard explains that

[w]ith that "and" in place, and with our disciplinary territories marked...we could easily share our stories of teaching and service and content ourselves with a bit of friendly theory-swapping.... [T]he title is meant as a provocation...that both fields might benefit in important ways from eliding that "and." Each can and should "write" the other, not just write to and about the other (2004, p. 225).

More than a decade later, Norgaard and his librarian colleague Caroline Sinkinson (2016) reflectively bemoan that, apart from locally driven, ad hoc efforts, neither LIS or WS embraced the attempt to conjoin these literacies.

Norgaard's theoretical point of view, however, did spawn continued discussion among LIS scholars (Baer, 2016; Elmborg, 2006; Elmborg & Hook, 2005; Escobar & Gauder, n.d.; Gamtso et al., 2013; Gauder & Escobar, 2014; Grettano & Witek, 2016;

Mazziotti & Grettano, 2011; McClure, 2016; Todorinova, 2010; Witek & Grettano, 2014; Zauha, 2014). Many LIS and some WS scholars began comparing ACRL and WPA outcomes documents. For instance, LIS scholar Mazziotti (now Witek) and WS scholar Grettano (2011) offer a side-by-side comparison of ACRL and WPA’s standards-based outcomes, making a compelling case that both literacies rely on a common set of Bloom’s intellectual moves. Just as Mazziotti and Grettano’s standards-based comparison went to press, both WPA and ACRL moved away from skills-based checklists to dispositional habits of mind³, prompting Grettano & Witek (2016) to re-examine literacy parallels. After carefully mapping aspirations from both frameworks, these instructors implemented at their university a first-year composition syllabus featuring student learning outcomes straddling both literacies. Figure 1 below excerpts a section of Grettano and Witek’s Table 3.1 outlining the parallels between WPA and ACRL frameworks (2016, pp. 234–235).

Figure 1

Parallels in WPA and ACRL frameworks⁴

WPA Framework	ACRL Framework
“conduct primary and secondary research using a variety of print and nonprint sources” in the “Develop Critical Thinking Through Writing, Reading, and Research” experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searching as Strategic Exploration • Authority Is Constructed and Contextual • Information Creation as a Process • Scholarship as Conversation • Information Has Value • Research as Inquiry

³ See WPA’s *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (2011) and ACRL’s *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2016).

⁴ WPA and ACRL framework quotes as cited in Grettano & Witek, 2016, p. 234.

If this small taste of parallel frameworks doesn't convince, I invite you to read the entire volume hosting their work, *Rewired: Research-Writing Partnerships Within the Frameworks* (McClure, 2016). In the editor's introduction, McClure asserts that "information literacy and writing instruction [are] family members who share DNA but grew up in different worlds" (2016, p. v) and that research-writing—or what Norgaard (2003, 2004) first called "writing information literacy"—is now an established term for what is a single, intertwined, and recursive process. McClure suggests these processes were always intended to be instructed together. LIS scholar Sharon Mader, Dean Emeritus from the University of New Orleans Library, concurs, saying that McClure's volume seeks to reunite kin who were "separated at birth" (2016, p. vii). While the WPA/ACRL frameworks unify the *Rewired* volume, contributors represent over a dozen universities that have intentionally revised their undergraduate writing curricula, partnering in significant ways with teaching librarians and including information literacy outcomes in their first-year writing and writing in the disciplines (WID) courses. Section three of the volume notably features assessment demonstrating that joint instruction amplifies both information literacy and writing outcomes. Similarly rooted in analyzing the parallel frameworks, LIS scholar Andrea Baer (2016) suggests writing-library collaborations are logical and worthwhile, but since she also acknowledges they are politically difficult, she stops short of suggesting integration.

Literacy Connections in Writing Studies/Writing Center Scholarship

If the library world was busy embracing literacy connections in 2016, so too was writing studies. While the two volumes we just considered were published for an LIS audience, *Information Literacy: Research and Collaboration across Disciplines*

(D'Angelo et al., 2016) was published for a composition audience. Also themed around the profound connections between frameworks, the D'Angelo et al. volume introduces shared vocabulary and values around multimodal literacies, threshold concepts, transfer of learning, and metaliteracy. Although heavily slanted toward partnerships between English composition and libraries, the volume includes two angles that both McClure and Baer miss: integrating information literacy in WID and researching employers' values around writing information literacy. While the *Information Literacy* volume suggests methods for increasing institutional conversation and structural mechanisms for ensuring attention to information literacy (see for example, Chapter 20: "Bridging the Gaps," pp. 411-428), it also stops short of pressing disciplinary professionals to embrace academic literacies as a unified ecology. In fact, as banner a year as 2016 was with overdue responses to Norgaard's 2004 argument for joint literacies, all three volumes fail to suggest mechanisms for uniting research-writing. Collectively, these scholars present disappointingly little transferable, principled *how* to unite literacies, but to their credit, they present a lot of compelling *why*.

If LIS and WS scholars barely move the needle in shifting the paradigm, writing center studies (WCS) scholars nearly fail to notice there's a paradigm to shift, even though writing centers may be in the best position to unify literacies in practice. Long ago, Elmborg and Hook's (2005) volume promoted writing center-library collaborations aimed at providing joint support for research and writing, yet chapter authors represent initiatives that stop miles short of integration. Like other LIS and WS scholars, they describe episodic partnerships for offering combined workshops or joint hours during crunch weeks. Yes, they prompt new vision by featuring a range of models, but they also

feature many of the personality driven partnerships Norgaard fears (2004). Two notable chapters, “Roots Intertwined” (Currie & Eodice, 2005) and “Yours, Mine, and Ours” (Leadley & Rosenberg, 2005) address Norgaard’s concerns by outlining methods of creating sustainable, systemic institutional support for collaborative models, but ironically, the collaborations described in these chapters didn’t survive these authors’ departures for other institutions. Clearly sustainability requires more than good ideas and good will. And just as clearly, even systemic models don’t stick unless practitioners fully embrace a united literacy ecology.

Of course good will does matter, so LIS scholar Elise Ferer (2012) takes a meta-analytic approach to identifying what LIS and WCS professionals desire of each other. Since LIS scholars publish their interests over twice as often as WCS scholars, Ferer had a much easier time identifying what librarians want from their writing center collaborators: co-outreach (p. 545), get-to-know-you-and-your-service activities (p. 546), space sharing (p. 547), co-teaching student/faculty workshops (pp. 548-49), and most of all “the training of tutors and/or writing center staff in library resources, research skills, and/or information literacy” (2012, p. 549). From scant WCS literature, Ferer finds just one thing writing center professionals want from library collaborators: help with promotion (p. 551). Since both LIS and WCS scholars publish in journals unlikely to be read by the other, it’s hard to imagine how either profession will get what they want⁵. Ferer goes on to push more aspirational ideas for partnering, but I can’t help noticing that LIS professionals seemingly express much more vision for integrating

⁵ The call for proposals issued by Habib and Nomubiru (2019) for a specially themed issue of writing center and library partnerships slated for *Writing Lab Newsletter: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* suggests nascent engagement in connecting literacies, but given the publication, the audience will likely be limited to WCS readers.

literacies than WCS professionals, whose desires are limited to enlisting the other's help with promoting siloed writing support. It's as if WCS literature is channeling the writing-smug younger me.

While the foregoing literature represents a two-pronged approach to literacy partnerships (library with writing, or library with writing center) rarely does literature represent collaborations among all three. But one case study at West Virginia University represents an LIS-WS-WCS trilateral partnership in first year composition (Brady et al., 2009). Although the various prongs play unequal roles (librarians are embedded, the writing center is not), all provide collaborative support for information literacy (IL), including three writing center tutors cross-trained in IL. Although the authors make helpful recommendations to guide would-be collaborators in other institutional contexts, the aim of their venture focuses exclusively on reporting IL outcomes as separate from writing outcomes, a contradictory failure to challenge literacy siloes. In a more recent but rare example contrasting bilateral and trilateral approaches, Napier et al. (2018) compared the outcomes of bilateral library–writing support against the outcomes from trilateral library–writing–writing center support. In the bilateral group, students received a library workshop consistent with traditional one-shots, whereas in the trilateral group, students received scaffolded workshops, first by studio staff who attended to framing an inquiry followed later by a library session focused on finding sources. The researchers (a collaborative group of librarians, writing faculty, and studio personnel) found that students in the trilateral group demonstrated greater proficiency with IL outcomes as measured through the holistic assessment of students' final writing, that is, embedding library IL sessions in writing classes “improve(s) students' ability to

locate and evaluate information, but students continue to struggle with the ‘use’ component of information literacy” (2018, p. 1). While this research offers compelling evidence for an integrated pedagogy, I note the practitioners take a sequential rather than integrated approach to literacy instruction, and like others before them, the researchers perpetuate discrete literacies by parsing outcomes.

Reading: The Orphaned Literacy

If scholars have made halting progress in envisioning a merged research and writing landscape, reading remains a whistle stop when it should be a destination. According to the 2015 *Nation’s Report Card* on reading, just 37% of high school graduates read at grade level or better. Although not all graduates go on to college, these numbers indicate that up to two thirds of first-year students may be significantly underprepared for college-level reading (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015). Although students rely on it more than any other literacy for success in college, reading remains mostly an orphan literacy, possibly because we subconsciously hold a once-for-all-time acquisition myth about reading. Neuroscientists beg to differ. From a human evolutionary perspective, reading is a new invention that the human brain is still evolving to accomplish (Dehaene, 2010; Wolf, 2008). By activating millions of neurons, readers’ brains manage parallel and collateral processes to achieve comprehension: decoding man-made symbols, recoding them to make meaning, holding meaning in working memory, storing meaning in long term memory, and retrieving meaning from storage. We may associate reading with leisure, but the reading brain is working very hard indeed.

Although it's beyond my scope to consider all the cognitive demands of reading, I will illustrate its complexity using just one process: memory. The reading brain first holds meaning in the working memory. Previously called short-term memory, working memory is not merely short in duration, about 2 seconds, but it's also limited in capacity, 2-7 chunks of information (Baddeley, 2007). Although affected by information complexity, familiarity, and interest/motivation, working memory is something like a small sieve that gradually dumps its contents as the brain continually fills with new. No wonder what I read sometimes goes in one eye and out the other! In effect, that's precisely what happens, because unless my brain prepares schema for filing information received from my overflowing working memory, older input simply trickles away. Communication between working and long-term memory must be continuous, meaning the brain must remain highly active and engaged. In short, the cognitive load for reading makes it neither easy nor passive. Unless readers are coached in a highly metacognitive process, we often aren't aware until we finish of a "Wait, what?" comprehension gap. Yet despite increased qualitative and quantitative demands of college reading both textual and digital, students are rarely supported in reading dense texts and unfamiliar genres. So, although faculty wring their hands at how little assigned reading students complete and although students have known comprehension difficulties, no discipline truly owns reading by offering adequate scholarship and evidence-based instructional practices.

Literacy practitioners seem to intuitively know we should be doing something more to support reading, so a handful of scholars have begun researching students' reading behaviors (Carillo, 2015, 2016; Horning et al., 2017; Horning & Kraemer, 2013; Jamieson, 2013). Some call into question how much (little?) reading college students are

doing and how much (little?) they comprehend it. For instance, in *The Citation Project's* (CP) intertextual analyses of 174 first-year papers collected across 16 colleges, researchers found that nearly 70% of citations were from the first page of a source (Jamieson, 2013). Further, in over 1900 pages of research-based writing, students rarely summarized the overall gist of source texts, preferring instead to copy one or two strategic sentences—just like the visitor in this chapter's opening transcript. Calling this hunter-gatherer practice “sentence-mining,” Jamieson and Howard (2013) point out that the data are equivocal: students may or may not be reading beyond the first page, and students may or may not be capable of the kind of deep reading it takes to synthesize complex concepts across multiple sources. Shockingly, we simply don't know.

Some scholars focus on reading behaviors particular to digital texts (Horava, 2015; Jabr, 2013; Nielsen, 2013; Wolf, 2008). Nielsen's usability studies (Nielsen, 1997, 2013, 2015) suggest that typical web reading behavior involves scanning and cherry-picking more than reading print. Using gaze plot tracking, Nielsen's group studied exactly which parts of web text were read thoroughly so that they could make usability recommendations regarding all-important web layout. Concluding that screen reading seems to invite more scanning, browsing, and hunting for keywords, Jabr (2013) notes that while engaging digital texts, readers fail to employ the same kind of metacognitive learning regulation that they do with physical text. As a result, screen readers generally more poorly comprehend and retain what they read. These scholars avoid judging one type of text as superior, but neuroscientist Maryanne Wolf (2008) claims that screen reading may alter the human brain for good. Noting that it took her weeks of screen fasting before she could once again get lost in a good book, Wolf claims her brain had

changed so that she could no longer summon sustained focus on physical text. LIS scholar Tony Horava (2015) notes these and other tendencies after reviewing Wolf and others, but he goes on to conclude that librarians have a role to play in teaching students how to become more critically aware of the strategies they are using. Jabr (2013) would agree, but although the metacognitive awareness students need to manage their text/screen strategies should be instructed, the reading process will likely remain unsupported without a literacy-as-ecology paradigm.

By now the need for reading instruction should be clear. Students come to college reading under grade level, unprepared for new academic genres, and lacking adaptive strategies for physical and screen reading. One might argue students lack preparation for college-level research and writing as well, but although both utterly rely on a reading foundation, there's far less academic support for reading than either research or writing. The answer to this compelling need is obviously not to create a new support silo; instead, inviting reading into the ecosystem essentially uses reading as a bridge in uniting support for all three. Since these three literacies rely on the same conceptual and processual cognitive skills as per Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2000), keeping them artificially separate is a folly sustained only by fossilized traditions and pedagogies.

Shifting Paradigms: Literacies as Ecology⁶

Implementing a new paradigm ideally requires new structures. Some readers may have the professional agency to propose new structures; many don't. Whereas I take on a top-down approach to structural and institutional change in [Chapter 6, "Value](#)

⁶ For a visual representation of academic literacies as ecology, see [Interchapter 3A, "Modeling Ecology,"](#) or the *Literacies Clusters Rosette* represented in the Appendix, p. 3.34.

[Added.](#)” in this chapter I focus on a bottom-up approach. Yes, structures affect practices, but practices can also powerfully affect structures. This bottom-up approach works even for those who are not well-positioned to alter structure. As organizational behavior expert Debra Meyerson (2001) suggests, we can all lead transformative change in low drama, high impact ways by working incrementally with respect, patience, and courage. Meyerson builds on the work of organizational theorist Karl Weick (1984), who sought to explain and counteract humans’ paralyzing failure to act when confronted with overwhelmingly large-scale problems such as world hunger. In an approach he calls “leveraging small wins,” Weick urges starting with do-able acts not only because such acts accrue but also because they often light the way to the next do-able act⁷. Dr. Ken Hudson (2020) suggests that the small-wins approach promotes inclusive ownership; that is, everyone in an organization has agency in shaping big change.

In urging practitioners to get busy winning small, I suggest do-able acts for professionals based on gaps I have noted within each home discipline. Of course, my perspective is biased. For LIS professionals, I can only offer an etic gaze: I perceive gaps in scholarship and practice that insiders may dispute—or I may have missed something obvious to insiders. For WCS professionals, I offer an emic gaze: I perceive gaps in scholarship that outsiders may not—or I may be blind to something obvious to outsiders. Adopt what resonates; leave what doesn't.

⁷ Astute readers will recognize leveraging small wins as part of scaffolding, which is essentially leveraging bite-sized strategies to yield big learning.

Principles and Practices for LIS Professionals

1. Adopt an evidence-based pedagogy.

Although MLS/MLIS program curricula have evolved, many still feature only one or two courses on pedagogy, shortchanging teaching librarians in major ways (Norgaard & Sinkinson, 2016, p. 16). Teaching rarely enjoys the same level of attention in LIS that it does in WS, possibly because information literacy is typically co-curricular rather than curricular. For instance, writing in the disciplines (WID) enjoys nearly universal acceptance on most campuses, but there is seldom a corresponding movement in information literacy. WS professionals are rarely credentialed without years of composition teaching experience, but LIS professionals may or may not have similar opportunities. In short, writing enjoys curricular positioning in ways information literacy doesn't, which may explain why LIS as a discipline languishes behind WS in articulating a common core of pedagogical practices and in designing curricula, syllabi, and assignments.

2. Value teaching over service.

Lacking an articulated LIS pedagogy forces practitioners to use service as a surrogate (Norgaard & Sinkinson, 2016, p. 17). Service models rarely reward pedagogically based assessments, shortchanging librarians' intellectual engagement in researching evidence-based innovation. The service model may be responsible for fossilizing the point-and-click demos⁸ so common to one-shot bibliographic instruction and in let-me-find-you-sources librarianship. Neither equips students for life-long

⁸ As my Seattle Pacific University librarian colleague Liz Gruchala-Gilbert (personal communication, June 28, 2020) points out, the current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic forces a reliance on online learning that may prompt a permanent flipped classroom approach to demos. When in-person instruction resumes, librarians can offer workshops that allow students to go deeper into merged literacies.

learning. Pleasing faculty customers may also keep LIS professionals from using their expertise to challenge ill-conceived research-writing assignments (Norgaard & Sinkinson, 2016). For example, for many years our librarians served students completing source scavenger hunts without engaging faculty in conversations about ways to make assignments more authentic and more likely to advance information literacy dispositions. In a teaching mindset, students must be equipped with research strategies for life-long learning pursuits, be they academic, employment, or self-sponsored learning, and faculty must be guided in developing assignments and practices that truly scaffold those outcomes for students.

3. Acknowledge that writing means information literacy.

Sometimes my LIS colleagues seem a little miffed that writing gets more institutional attention than information literacy. Most higher education institutions (HEIs) have writing requirements, so faculty ask more about how to teach writing than research/reading. I may hate that faculty still complain, “Johnny can’t read/write,” but at least these exaggerations mean they care about both literacies. I admit I’ve heard far fewer say, “Johnny can’t research,” so my LIS colleagues may perceive a lack of interest. But when students and faculty say *writing*, they mean information literacy, even if they don’t use the jargon. In the silo paradigm, practitioners see literacy as a zero-sum game in which support for your literacy means less support for mine. Embracing a merged literacy ecology means we all row for the same team. If it helps advance research-oriented dispositions, just call information literacy *writing*. Because it is.

4. Share library political capital in literacy communities of practice.

LIS practitioners currently enjoy an interdisciplinary political capital that WS and WCS professionals often do not. Since most campus stakeholders view libraries as the intellectual, interdisciplinary crossroads of HEIs, teaching librarians often develop close connections with faculty teaching courses with research-based writing assignments. In contrast, faculty often unfavorably associate first-year writing and writing center programs with English departments, causing a disciplinary credibility gap. Librarians routinely work across disciplines or are directly embedded in departments, but writing professionals typically remain unincorporated unless librarians represent a literacy ecosystem. Most HEIs also have a much larger cadre of teaching librarians than writing professionals, so a more expansive community of practice would be helpful in advancing literacies. For instance, at my University, we consider ourselves short-handed with just a dozen teaching librarians, but, despite a significant writing requirement, we employ just one cross-disciplinary, part-time writing professional. Their situation is not just lonely; it is impossible to be impactful without shared professional connections.

Principles and Practices for WS Professionals

1. Attend to academic literacies in first-year composition.

Faculty in the disciplines seem to believe first-year composition a one-size-fits-all course that will inoculate students against bad writing for all time. When students show up in departmental majors, faculty may believe students are underprepared because of poor first-year curriculum or inadequate graduate student instructors. Although we know literacies develop over a lifetime, these faculty may have a point. Equipping

students with a full range of academic literacies may be the holistic approach departmental faculty are asking for.

2. Invite LIS and WCS into the composition community of practice.

Because composition suffers a skills-based stigma (even tenured composition faculty are often lower on the food chain than their closest colleagues in English Literature), you'd think composition faculty would band together with literacy professionals suffering a prestige gap. Instead, some WS faculty assert their importance over both LIS and WCS scholars, enacting a stereotypical kick-the-dog trope. In my HEI, for example, past first-year writing graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) outsourced grammar teaching to the writing center in favor of loftier curricular goals. Once GTAs and tutors developed even a nascent community of practice, outsourcing stopped and partnership started.

3. Share curricular political capital.

If librarians have interdisciplinary capital, WS faculty have curricular capital. Many HEIs require one or more lower-division writing courses and capstone or writing intensive experiences, but few grant formal credits for library or writing center learning. In an ecology paradigm, writing expands to include reading, researching, and even listening and speaking. If competing in the old paradigm is subtractive, collaborating in the new paradigm will be multiplicative. I harbor a not-so-secret desire to re-brand Writing in the Disciplines (WID) as Inquiry in the Disciplines (IID) because the proposed name communicates a literacy ecology united to serve the inquiry curriculum all disciplines hold in common. Until this revolution, WS practitioners should make

space for literacy writ large in their curricula so students gain experience with the holistic approach to the literacies their future careers demand.

Principles and Practices for WCS Professionals

1. Cultivate pro-active centrality to institutional mission.

Sports coaches often say the best offense is a good defense. Maybe that's why some WCS professionals cultivate a protectionist stance toward campus collaborations (Harris, 2000; Salem, 2014; Sunstein, 1998). But I urge WCS professionals to flip the script: a good offense is the best defense. A holistic approach to literacy increases student participation, contributes to inclusive success, connects with HEIs' core missions, and yields outcomes of value to campus stakeholders and future employers (Cyphert & Lyle, 2016). Studios and writing centers that coach holistic literacies alert students to the normalcy of an integrated process; more importantly, WCS professionals in a holistic community of practice alert faculty to the dangers of teasing out individual literacies. No literacy can be elegantly acquired or practiced in isolation; they must all grow together.

2. Research and share the student perspective on literacy learning.

Whereas LIS and WS practitioners arguably connect most tightly with faculty, WCS practitioners connect most tightly with students; together, they afford a potent 360-degree view of teaching and learning. Writing centers know which course assignments are universally dreaded or confusing because students are simply more comfortable self-disclosing in a peer-ethos thirdspace. WCS professionals are uniquely positioned to research students' literacy learning behaviors in ways that can help other HEI stakeholders understand the acquisition process, and we are also uniquely positioned to sponsor undergraduate research on teaching and learning in ways that

augment the democratization of knowledge-making. This approach is fundamentally anti-oppressive and bears deep fruit for transforming the academy.

3. Offer a deep well of strategies to scaffold growth in cognitive and processual literacy understandings.

LIS and WS colleagues offer a wealth of classroom-based strategies, but when generic strategies need to be altered on the spot to meet individual learning preferences or universal design, WCS practitioners who work primarily one-to-one have more experience with individualizing process strategies. Over my years in the classroom, I gained a modest toolbox of writing process strategies. But now as a Studio veteran coaching the full range of connected literacies, I have developed exponentially more. Further, I am well-practiced in the principles behind adapting strategies⁹ to individual learner preferences.

4. Lead the campus in linking literacies and communities of practice.

Because student learners come to us practicing the full range of academic literacies, WCS practitioners seem well-positioned to act as what Malcom Gladwell (2002) calls “connectors,” people at the nexus of multiple social networks. Now almost six years into our approach to our Studio’s merger of research, reading, and writing, we think like connectors. For instance, we began asking ourselves what other literacies (quantitative, digital, speaking/listening) connect within an academic literacy ecology? To what extent does the whole ecology rely on common cognitive moves, and in what ways can those moves be scaffolded with similar strategies? In thinking these questions through, we identified connections between presentational literacies, writing and

⁹ For more on tailoring strategies, see [Interchapter 2B, “Channeling Dr. Frankenstein.”](#)

speaking, and receptive literacies¹⁰ (reading, listening, researching), so the Hacherl Studio began adding support for listening and speaking. Now that our Tutoring Center falls under the same organizational umbrella, we are exploring connections with quantitative reasoning. Since the Tutoring Center enjoys greater credibility in STEM, we eventually plan on equipping science tutors to coach lab report writing. The possibilities will align differently in each institution, but note how well-positioned WCS practitioners are to discover, propose, implement, and assess these linkages.

Faculty often identify threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2005) that, once understood by novice students, will usher in deep disciplinary understandings. Threshold concepts change everything, they shift paradigms—they help us see anew. I argue that it is past time for LIS, WS, and WCS professionals to embrace our own threshold concept: academic literacies are a single ecology. Of course, like all threshold concepts, literacy as ecology is troublesome; it fundamentally disrupts our comfortable identities and our historical practices. New habits of mind challenge structures, and developing new structures is tricky and painful—and makes our brains hurt. But re-imagining and innovating is exactly what is being required of HEIs. Imagine future structures: LIS degree programs will feature expertise in all the literacies as will composition programs. Faculty, staff, and tutors will be cross equipped in strategies to support an interdependent literacy ecology. The ACRL and WPA will merge, or at least their frameworks will, and reading will take a rightful place in the family. Literacy scholars on tenure lines will forward theory, research, and pedagogy not for discrete literacies but for the ecology, and tenure and promotion will generously reward this

¹⁰ As we've seen earlier in this chapter, neuroscientists are uncovering the highly complex neuroprocessing that challenge the so-called passive acts of cognition.

approach. Yes, we will retain areas of specialization just as in biology or anthropology. But academic literacies would be a single discipline with common scholarship and common pedagogical practices.

I can hear readers arguing: “B..b..but, upending disciplinary structures is simply beyond our control.” Yes, but there are always do-able acts. For instance, let’s re-write our opening session from an ecology point of view.

Studio Assistant (SA): Hm, I see this last citation is from freeresearchpaper.com.

V: Is that cited correctly?

SA: I’m thinking about the source itself. Could we look at it together?

V: Sure, it’s just a website with a paper on multiple intelligences. I need at least one web source, and this quote is exactly what I need to back up my argument.

SA: Wait, could we talk more about source use? I worry when people cherry-pick convenient facts and throw out inconvenient ones, don’t you? What did you read that complicated your notion of multiple intelligences?

V: Actually, I had trouble finding sources.

SA: Oh! So “freeresearchpaper.com” might not be your first choice?

V: No! I couldn’t find anything else, and I didn’t really have time to read anything dense for this little paper. I have a big one I’m worried about.

SA: So how about if we look at the search strategies you’re using. I’ll bet we can enhance those, which will help for this and for your bigger paper.

V: I didn’t want to ask. I thought I should already know this stuff.

SA: Not at all, research is like detective work. The methods are complicated!

—Hypothetical transcript from an integrated literacies Studio session

In our Studio where integrated literacies is one of our signature pedagogies, conversations like this occur every day, and they are very much in our control.

Individually, these conversations may not perceptibly change the institution, but they do change us, and they change students, and we shouldn't underestimate how these do-able practices accrue. Collectively, this approach begins normalizing for HEIs what students already intuit: literacy is a chaotic, recursive, messy, and entirely interconnected process. Support for it should be too.

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Appendix

Visual Representation of a Literacies Ecology

Western Washington University's General University Requirements:
Literacies Clusters Rosette
(Western Washington University, Committee on Undergraduate Education, 2019)

