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A Kairos of the Critical: Teaching Critically in a Time of Compliance

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Abstract

The promise of critical pedagogy lies in its capacity to change lives as librarians try new ways of thinking and teaching that challenge systems of power that privilege some and not others. In the last ten years, critical pedagogy has moved from the margins to the center, most clearly in its influence on the new *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education*. Frames like Information has Value and Authority is Constructed have long been tenets of critical voices in the field, voices that can now be heard emanating from the center of our professional lives. And yet, critical approaches to teaching and learning face acute challenges from a higher education environment that increasingly values teaching and learning by the numbers, tying everything from accreditation to book budgets to quantifiable outcomes. Surfacing these tensions can inform the actions librarians take in the classroom.

Keywords: Kairos; information literacy; Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education; critical pedagogy

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A Kairos of the Critical: Teaching Critically in a Time of Compliance

The actions librarians take in their classrooms, at their reference desks, and in their institutions are informed by social, political, and economic contexts that influence the range of actions one can take—or even imagine possible to take—in any given moment (Drabinski, 2014). The Greek notion of *kairos*, or qualitative time, offers a lens that re-presents the moment from a useful analytic distance. Rather than interrogating whether a particular approach is right or wrong, a *kairotic* approach offers a way of analyzing the structures and claims that undergird particular decisions made at a range of scales, from individual classrooms to institutional statements of priority to professional associations and the stories they tell about the work that professionals do. Using *kairos* as an analytic frame enables a critique of the present as a time produced by structural forces, rather than as simply true or given.

This article uses the idea of *kairos*, or time married to action and context, to articulate the challenge of the present moment for information literacy instruction. The usefulness of this heuristic for describing and discussion contemporary instruction practice is explored at length elsewhere (Drabinski, 2014). For the terms of this discussion, it is useful to revisit the meaning of the term. *Chronos* is ordinal time, or time that merely counts: 9:45am, Friday morning, June, or 2016. *Kairos*, a Greek idea of qualitative time, marries *chronos* time with social, political, and historical context to a sense of the present. Five o'clock in *chronos* is quitting time or happy hour in *kairos*. From the perspective of *kairos*, the question, "What time is it?" takes on a different valence. It asks us to consider and articulate the material conditions that produce a certain sort of present, and the decisions we feel called to make in that present. Five o'clock understood from the perspective of *kairos* asks us to choose between a pint of beer, a glass of wine, or a seltzer in response to the material conditions of happy hour. At the scale of library instruction programs, *kairos* helps us understand why we might choose to spend our time designing testing instruments to measure learning instead of problem-based learning exercises that move students toward understanding the metaphor that articulates scholarship as conversation.

Contemporary instruction librarians in the United States find themselves inhabiting two competing and compelling kairotic stories. On the one hand, librarians teach in a time of compliance. The kairos of compliance requires a reduction of the teaching and learning in libraries to what can be counted and reported to administrators, who then further crunch the numbers for IPEDS and accreditation so that libraries can provide evidence of value and proof that various outcomes standards have been achieved. On the other, librarians teach in a time of critical engagement, one in which theories and practices that contest traditional notions of power and authority are increasingly becoming the mainstream of information literacy work. These two competing and, arguably, incompatible stories of kairos comprise a conundrum: how can teaching librarians respond both to the professional focus on critical teaching practice that currently occupies the center of information literacy discourse and practice, while simultaneously complying with demands for the production of data and evidence that sit uncomfortably alongside? Conceptualizing these two strands of contemporary information literacy discourse as kairotic offers an analytic distance that can inform strategic information literacy practice.

The difficulties and divisiveness that mark our contemporary information literacy moment were made clear during professional discussions regarding the development and adoption of the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Framework) as a critical alternative to the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (Standards). Many librarians embraced the Framework in part because of its frank and direct engagement with critical perspectives in the field. At the same time, others bridled at the absence of clear directions to help librarians produce the kinds of evidence necessary to meet institutional data gathering requirements. The Framework's perspective on assessment fits hand in glove with critical pedagogy, emphasizing the importance of local, contextual learning outcomes that are measured with tools that make local and contextual sense. However, this approach somewhat paradoxically requires librarians to spend more time conducting the assessment work that many critical practitioners contest on the grounds that it constitutes a distraction from teaching and learning. If librarians spend more time developing measurement tools, they must spend less time doing other forms of liberatory work in the library. This paradox emerges from competing kairotic demands.

A Time of Compliance

There are, of course, many stories that one could tell about the present, and the stories one tells depend very much on where one stands. From the perspective of librarians responsible for information literacy, one dominant *kairos* manifests as a strong demand for compliance with various norms and regulations about student learning through the production of and reporting of data. This aspect of the present moment was articulated and defended by a group of New Jersey librarians in their opposition to the Framework in a 2014 *Open Letter* that argued against rescinding the Standards as “tone deaf to the politics of Higher Ed” (Berg et al, 2014).

Accountability has long been central to higher education administration. As William M. Zumeta (2011) describes, the texture of demands for accountability and compliance have changed over time, but have always played a role in the relationship of the state to colleges and universities. In its origins, U.S. higher education was explicitly separated from federal or state governmental control via the 1819 *Dartmouth v. Woodward* Supreme Court decision that determined that only Dartmouth College, not the state of New Hampshire, could fire a college trustee member. This established a corporate governance model for private higher education in the U.S.: boards of trustees controlled decision-making, not government entities (Zumeta, 2011, p. 135).

In contrast, public and land grant universities were accountable to local and state governmental entities: because they were funded by state budgets they were accountable to state legislatures for budgets and resource allocation. States took little interest in academic or curricular issues, as these were seen as outside the purview of government control. Whether private or public, institutions of higher education were not accountable to the federal government in any direct way. Indeed, the federal Department of Education was not a cabinet department until 1979, and just a scant three years later, President Ronald Reagan sought to abolish it completely (Good, 2010).

The 1980s marked a shift in the federal government’s approach to accountability in higher education. Upon taking office, President Reagan appointed Terrel Bell as Secretary of Education, hoping that he would work to limit federal involvement in education (Good, 2010). Bell convened the National Commission on Excellence in Education to study the state of higher education in the United States and in 1983, the Commission released their

landmark report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983). Citing “a rising tide of mediocrity,” the report claimed that failings in the system of higher education would lead inevitably to declines in economic prosperity as well as “the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people which knit together the very fabric of our society.” Accountability could no longer simply be confined to hitting budget targets, and states were not the only stakeholders who needed to be involved. The federal government now had a vested interest in tracking outcomes related to retention, graduation, and student learning (Zumeta, 2011, p. 137). The very persistence of the nation was at stake.

Rather than take on an explicit governance role, the federal government ceded its power to accrediting bodies that carry out the task of affirming the “excellence” of education offerings in higher education, both public and private. Unlike many other countries, colleges and universities in the United States are not subject to particular federal rules and regulations (U.S. Department of Education). Higher education accrediting bodies are “private, nongovernmental organizations created for the specific purpose of reviewing higher education institutions and programs for quality” (Council for Higher Education Accreditation), and are granted the authority to accredit institutions and programs. Accreditation makes a school eligible to receive federal monies, including in the form of student aid like Pell Grants and federal student loans. Without federal aid dollars, tuition-dependent colleges and universities could not open their doors. Accreditation serves as the enforcement arm of federal oversight of higher education.

The outcomes and accountability movement ignited by *A Nation at Risk* in the 1980s has led to “a focus on a focus on standards, goals, and measures to ensure that both students and teachers alike are achieving to their prescriptive maximum potential” (Good, 2011). During Barack Obama’s presidency, reporting and accountability mechanisms expanded, exemplified by the 2015 launch of his College Scorecard in 2015 (Office of the Press Secretary). The Scorecard ostensibly enables students to compare institutions of higher education across a range of measures including annual cost, graduation rate, and average salary after attending. While lacking in enforcement power, the Scorecard represents the culmination of what began under Terrel Bell and his Commission: higher education is now framed as a commodity that is purchased by students in order to achieve certain outcomes that are proved through the reporting processes enabled by the linking of accreditation and federal financial aid.

These demands for the production of data and reporting that confirm outcomes comprise a kairos of compliance. The demands for data production and reporting structure actions in time as librarians measure and report in response to compliance contexts. In some cases, this can take very explicit form. At Long Island University, adherence to learning outcomes assessment protocols is mandatory in order to request funding for new faculty positions in any department. The priorities of the accrediting body compel these assessment reports from the institution. In turn, Middle States embeds learning assessment across multiple standards of excellence in order to demonstrate their own rigor to federal governing entities. These actions can all be understood as responses and reactions to the kairos of compliance, produced by the constraints of a particular contextual time.

ACRL has responded to the kairos of compliance by producing toolkits, publications, round tables, journals, conferences, reports, workshops, and webinars to help academic librarians meet data-generation and compliance needs. In some cases, the association has produced direct evidence of the impact of the library on student learning, intended to be used by academic librarians across the higher education landscape. In spring 2016, ACRL's Value of Academic Libraries project released a report that proclaimed the discovery of "compelling evidence" that the library plays a significant role in student learning outcomes, retention, and graduation rates (ACRL Value of Academic Libraries). Supplying librarians with this kind of support for their compliance work has become a notable aspect of the work the professional association undertakes.

While the toolkits, roundtables, journals, conferences, reports, workshops, and webinars that constitute a response to compliance demands appear in the present, they also constitute historical artifacts. The present, after all, is always receding. Rather than understanding these documents, events, and occasions as sites of truth-telling devices, we might productively understand these artifacts as evidence of a moment in which we find ourselves, the kairos of professional librarianship. The constellation of assessment devices emerges from a context that demands data and compliance. The professional focus on assessment amplifies and extends the value and meaning of those kairotic demands, helping to produce a future where data will be the currency of teaching and learning. In a time when all things must be measured and all data must be validated, librarians are both produced by and productive of a kairos of compliance.

A Kairos of the Critical

The compliance-oriented emphasis on data, evidence, proof, and truth constitutes one story about the kairos of teaching and learning in libraries. Librarians are also living and working in a kairos of the critical, a time when critical perspectives on the work of the library suffuse the mainstream of LIS work and thought. Critical approaches to teaching and learning in libraries are not new, but their prominence in professional discourse and practice is notable. Since the publication of *Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods* (Accardi, Drabinski, & Kumbier 2010), the first collected volume of essays about critical pedagogy directed toward practicing librarians, the field has seen an enormous increase in publications and professional conversations around critical pedagogy in libraries.

Critical pedagogy and librarian conversations have become central in both published discourse and in professional gatherings, including smaller, local workshops and colloquia, and as content streams in mainstream conferences. Critical librarianship practitioners and scholars like Safiya Noble, Maria T. Accardi, and Chris Bourg are regularly asked to keynote conference stages. Events like the University of Arizona's 2016 Critical Librarianship and Pedagogy conference and Library Juice Press-sponsored events addressing issues of gender and sexuality and environmental sustainability center critical perspectives. In 2015, the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians conference theme was "critical practice" and critical librarianship unconferences were featured at ACRL 2015 and that year's ALA Annual Conference. The "#critlib unconference" model is also scheduled for ACRL 2017 in Baltimore, Maryland. In social media spaces, the hashtag #critlib is widely circulated, constituting a virtual community of librarians interested in critical approaches to librarianship.

These public forms of scholarship are coupled with significant scholarship in critical librarianship in the past decade, a discourse that runs adjacent to compliance conversations about metrics and values. Library Juice Press has published two volumes of practitioner literature about critical pedagogy: *Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods* (2010) and *Information Literacy and Social Justice* (2013). These two volumes amplify and extend connections between critical studies in rhetoric and research by Barbara Fister (1993), information literacy as a constraining analytic approach described by Christine Pawley (2003), and foundational work on critical teaching by James Elmborg (2006) and reflective practice by Heidi Jacobs (2008). In 2015, Eamon Tewell published a literature review of

scholarship in information literacy, and in 2016, Annie Downey published her dissertation work as a book, *Critical Information Literacy: Foundations, Inspiration, and Ideas*. These two synthetic works fix in the literature and in the professional discourse the story of a contemporary focus on critical pedagogy in library instruction.

This is not to say that critical and political perspectives have not suffused professional librarian discourse in other times and places. Librarianship has a long history of critical and radical political engagement, including the establishment of the Social Responsibilities Round Table through the American Library Association to address political concerns within the organization. Identity-based groups like the Black Caucus and the GLBT Round Table work on behalf of librarians and patrons marginalized by a mainstream librarianship that is marked by dominant whiteness and heterosexuality, among other hegemonic modes of social being. Groups like the Progressive Librarians Guild (Harger, 1995) and Radical Reference (Morrone & Friedman, 2009) have developed outside of professional governing bodies as adjunct sites of resistance.

Rather than argue that the contemporary discourse of critical pedagogy in libraries is exceptional or unique, its emergence as a counter to the language and practice of compliance is what is interesting here. What can explain the centrality of critical perspectives, particularly when the kairos would seem to demand some other kind of institutional reaction? To what kairos does this resurgence of critical perspectives respond? If we understand action and discourse as both produced by and productive of the present, the coincidence of critical and compliance perspectives makes analytic sense. The kairos of contemporary critical approaches is not generic, but emerges from and alongside a kairos of compliance that it contests and resists.

Contemporary discourse of critical pedagogy in libraries argues against several elements of compliance-based higher education: the emphasis on defining measurable outcomes, generating and reporting evidence, and reducing the complexities of teaching and learning to reductive and simplistic explanations of both problems and solutions. Christine Pawley (2003) captures these critiques well in the figure of the Procrustean bed. A figure from Greek mythology, Procrustes lived along the route from Athens to Eleusis. He would invite pilgrims traveling the sacred road to stay the night, and while they were sleeping he would cut and stretch their bodies to fit his bed precisely. Pawley locates a troubling “Procrustean

paradigm” in information literacy work, one that forces the varied forms of information production, seeking, and use into an atomized set of mechanistic requirements disconnected from the concrete practice of particular students producing, seeking, and using information in everyday academic life. Maura Seale (2010) extends Pawley’s critique, arguing that the Standards fix in place definitions of information, literacy, and student that foreclose learning that might contest or upend any of those three things. James Elmborg (2006) has argued that the Standards reify hierarchies of knowledge production, positioning students as consumers of information produced by other people, experts who know things that students are required to learn. For Pawley, Seale, Elmborg and others, standards are inextricable from the style of education extended by compliance modes of teaching and learning. Because they define in advance in rather narrow ways what matters in teaching and learning, Standards are necessarily mechanistic and rote. Similar arguments are made in K-12 education, where standards and testing are the norm. Because they cannot capture the messy, iterative, long-time-scale nature of learning, standards enact a mechanistic fantasy, one that inevitably leads to testing and reporting in order to ensure that various programs are up to snuff.

Critical perspectives on information literacy instruction represent a reaction against the kairos of compliance. While critical pedagogy theory and practice has an extended history outside of library instruction discourse, its emergence in the professional library discourse can be tied to the rise of standards-based teaching and learning. The kairos of compliance is productive both of a complex apparatus of metrics and measurement as well as the resistance to those higher education structures. The kairos of compliance produces a kairos of the critical. The two kairotic moments develop together, posing something of a paradox for those who see information literacy as field that progresses in linear fashion as the present and future build on what has been done and discovered in the past.

Where Compliance and the Critical Combine

The complex interplay of compliance-based and critically-informed approaches in the field manifested in the struggles around the transition from the Information Literacy Competency Standards to the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education that marked academic librarianship beginning in 2014. A fraught process, the development of the Framework attempted to respond to the critiques of the Standards posed by critical librarians. At the same time, the critical elements of the Framework were moderated and disciplined as they emerged in the context of a professional body that also has a

responsibility to assist members in meeting compliance requirements in the realm of accreditation and other higher education institutional requirements. The tensions that emerged within the field demonstrate the challenges of navigating two competing and co-productive kairotic moments: compliance and the critical.

Since 2000, librarians have organized information literacy instruction using the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. This set of performance indicators and measurable outcomes structured the ways that many information literacy programs are organized, delivered, and assessed. The Standards have productively enabled libraries to define for themselves a teaching location within the academy: academic librarians define and take pedagogical responsibility for information literacy learning outcomes and their assessment. The Standards also accompanied significant growth in the role of librarians as teachers, and have been central to the consolidation of a teaching identity for many librarians. For librarians entering the field after 2000, the Standards can seem to represent what information literacy *is* as we mapped our curricula to the learning outcomes in that document and designed pre- and post-test questions using the performance indicators.

The Standards have played an important role in helping libraries function in the kairos of compliance. The Standards apparatus produced by ACRL has had important material effects on many libraries and library instruction programs. The Standards have been used by many professionals to help articulate their role as central to teaching and learning in higher education both inside the university and to external stakeholders. In the data-driven contexts in which many librarians work, the clarity and specificity that critical voices challenge in the Standards has also facilitated data collection and reporting, helping librarians “articulate their value” in order to secure funding for classrooms, computers, projectors, and library faculty and staff. The Standards emerged as a response to the kairos of compliance, extended that kairos and enabling librarians to garner a share of the material benefits.

Given that critical perspectives in the field are so often framed in response to the Standards, we can see that document as simultaneously productive of its own critique. In this analysis, the Standards become an exemplar of compliance-based higher education more than simply one of many potentially useful articulations of information literacy by the profession.

Debates about the Standards are evacuated of struggles over internal meaning—we no longer debate whether students ought to be able to define information needs, for example—and replaced by critical discussions of whether information literacy is a thing that could be measured and reported at all. Insofar as the Framework is written as an explicit rejection of Standards-based teaching in libraries, it represents the most significant effort of mainstream professional librarianship to intervene in and reshape the kairos of compliance toward a kairos of the critical. The Framework represents, at least in part, an attempt to think, write, and demonstrate a way out of compliance culture, producing a new kairos of the critical. As a document, it represents an incorporation of many critical perspectives in the field, and has been welcomed by many as a document that offers a way out of the Procrustean bed of the Standards. It represents an intervention in the kairos of compliance, an effort to create a different kind of future.

The Framework was developed initially as part of the cyclical revision process for the Standards for Information Literacy. The group assembled to revise the Standards did not produce what many librarians expected them to: small changes and alterations to a document whose bones would be left fundamentally intact. Instead, the Framework represents a significant shift in the professional association's approach to information literacy, explicitly rejecting the standards while incorporating much of the decade of critique that grew up alongside them. The Framework represents an institutional effort to intervene in compliance cultures that produced and are produced by the fixed and functional outcomes and indicators in the Standards document.

This is the story the Framework tells about itself. The document lays claim to “richer, more complex ideas,” and notes that it is “called a framework intentionally because it is based on a cluster of interconnected core concepts, with flexible options for implementation, rather than on a set of standards or learning outcomes, or any prescriptive enumeration of skills” (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016). In its description of its warrant, the Framework explicitly rejects the Procrustean bed of compliance-based teaching and learning and resists the prescriptivism of the Standards. The document does include knowledge practices and dispositions that some have noted operate in the same way that the outcomes and indicators of the standards do, but the Framework anticipates this critique, arguing that “neither the knowledge practices nor the dispositions that support each concept are intended to prescribe what local institutions should do in using the *Framework*; each library and its partners on campus will need to deploy these frames to best fit their own situation,

including designing learning outcomes. For the same reason, these lists should not be considered exhaustive” (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016). The Framework insists on local and contextual articulation of information literacy pedagogy, a response that directly addresses one of the major criticisms of the Standards.

As it distances itself from the prescriptivism of the Standards, the Framework repeatedly disavows its role as a document that would tell librarians what to do in their roles as data gatherers and reporters working in a time of compliance. Instead, it attempts to shape future discourse in information literacy, seeking to change the kairos to one of critical engagement with themes in the field. In other words, the Framework attempts to operationalize critique as a mode of pedagogical praxis, rather than the metrics mode encouraged by the Standards. The Framework is less interested in shaping what librarians do than in determining what librarians think and talk about it, much of it emerging from a critical perspective.

The structuring of the document as a series of frames, or ways of seeing, rather than as targets to be achieved represents a structural shift away from compliance culture. The content of these frames incorporate critical perspectives, urging librarians to grapple with ideas in addition to measurement and reporting. For example, the first Frame is titled *Authority is Constructed and Contextual*. One of central issues that critical librarians have had with the Standards is the way the document constructs information as an object or thing separable from the social and political dynamics that produce it and inform its reception. The Standards sidestep the ways that that context determines authority. For example, a scholarly journal article about Pokémon carries one kind of authority in a certain discourse community, while the fan discussions in the online encyclopedia Bulbapedia have authority in fan cultures. Authority always relies on who is in a position to know, what social and political structures make it possible for one author to know more than the reader, and the audience to whom the author is speaking. Authority has a rhetorical dimension. There is no reason this conceptual approach to authority could not obtain in a classroom designed around the Standards, but the valence is different. The Framework makes the conceptual discussion the point of information literacy work while Standards-based teaching pushes the librarian to measure whether or not that concept has been grasped and understood in a measurable way. The Framework is explicit about the socially constructed nature of authority, arguing that information literacy includes the ability to “acknowledge biases that privilege some sources of authority over others, especially in terms of others’ worldviews,

gender, sexual orientation, and cultural orientations.” As a governing document, the Framework effectively places at the center of professional discourse an idea of authority as rooted in context, as contested and subject to contestation by our students. This is a distinctly critical move, one that seeks to produce a future of critical engagement rather than compliance with an external learning outcomes document.

Similarly, the third Frame, *Information Has Value*, directly engages with the political economy of information production, marking a second critical turn in information literacy documentation. Here, the professional association deliberately addresses the problem of the commodification of information, an artifact of a compliance culture that reduces everything to the measurable and the countable. The Framework addresses the cultural specificity of that commodification, suggesting that the world could be otherwise, noting that, “intellectual property is a legal and social construct that varies by culture” (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016). An acknowledgement of variation and contingency is something that critical librarians have long argued for, as is the implicit claim here that capitalist ideas of property are not natural or eternal. The Framework moves this idea from the periphery of compliance modes of practice to the center of professional discourse.

The *Value* Frame also emphasizes the role that students play as creators of information. The Framework casts students as agents of social change, “contributors to the information marketplace rather than only consumers of it” (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016). Not only is the student entitled to contribute, she is responsible for deciding “where and how...information is published.” Here, the Framework connects with ongoing critical conversations about the political economy of information production and circulation. The Framework asks the profession to invite students into critical conversations around issues like open access. It is not that these conversations could not be had when information literacy instruction was governed by the Standards, but that these conversations were secondary to the measurable and reportable.

Finally, the fifth Frame, *Scholarship as Conversation*, engages directly with ideas from critical information literacy, particularly discussions of research as rhetoric begun by Barbara Fister in 1993. Fister’s work casts information as rhetorically situated rather than as fixed objects of analysis. Fister and the critical librarians who have followed her argue that information only has meaning as it is constructed in dialogue. This strand of critical information literacy

resists the reification of *information*, *literacy*, and *student*, instead keeping all three in motion as sites of analysis, criticism, and debate. The document argues that

Research in scholarly and professional fields is a discursive practice in which ideas are formulated, debated, and weighed against one another over extended periods of time. Instead of seeking discrete answers to complex problems, experts understand that a given issue may be characterized by several competing perspectives as part of an ongoing conversation in which information users and creators come together and negotiate meaning. Experts understand that, while some topics have established answers through this process, a query may not have a single uncontested answer. (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016).

The Framework resists the quantification and calculation required by compliance culture in its emphasis on “competing perspectives” and the need to “negotiate meaning.” In its refusal of the fixed identity of information and meaning, the Framework attempts to shift the profession to a *kairos* of the critical. While the Frame is ostensibly concerned with defining a way of thinking about scholarship, it also poses a direct challenge to a compliance mode that requires that knowledge and meaning be settled questions in order to be measured and reported. A *kairos* of compliance requires the capacity to generate correct answers. In its resistance to fixed meaning, the fifth Frame gestures toward a *kairos* of the critical instead.

What Comes Next

Since its filing and subsequent adoption, the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education has not jettisoned the demands of the *kairos* of compliance. We have not arrived in a new time that no longer requires data reporting for accreditation. While it represents the first significant profession-wide adoption of critical pedagogy and critical information literacy concepts, the Framework does not mean that the qualitative time in which librarians find themselves will instantly be different. The Framework is, after all, only a document and a set of conversations. The work of transforming the culture of information literacy must contend with material conditions that promote metrics and measurements, even when this is not the direction in which the profession rhetorically pushes itself. Indeed, remnants of and nods to the demands of measurement and metrics are included throughout the Framework. For example, the document acknowledges the cultural specificity of

“intellectual property,” but lists respect for it as an essential “disposition.” And while it codifies much of the criticism of compliance modes of teaching, it has also produced its own critique, much of which points to the value of the Standards as a document that enables librarians to produce and report data (Bombaro, 2016)

If kairos is about both the quality of a given time and the actions that can be taken, it is telling that many of the initial responses to the Framework have been aligned with the kairos of compliance rather than the kairos of the critical that the Framework engages and attempts to extend. For example, the replacement of the Standards with the Framework would seem to favor an end of standardized testing in libraries like the Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS). A model response to a time of compliance, SAILS promises to “allow you to identify strengths and weaknesses,” signaling the exam’s alliance with assessment-based teaching and learning (Project SAILS, 2015). Without measurable performance indicators, exams like this one would seem to have no place in the new Framework world. Instead, the debut of the Framework was met with news of the Threshold Achievement Test for Information Literacy, a standardized assessment tool “inspired by one or more of the frames of the ACRL IL Framework” (Carrick Enterprises, 2016). At the threshold of two competing notions of time, the compliant and the critical, corporate entities have continued to design ways to generate profit from the demand for data. Incorporating critical perspectives in a professional document can change the discourse around information literacy instruction, but it cannot immediately alter the markets that have emerged to capture the surplus produced by this mode of higher education.

For librarians who want to contest and subvert data-driven teaching and learning in libraries, the challenge extends beyond the production of documents like the Framework. The difficulty of resisting the kairos of compliance can be seen in the text of the Framework, itself a response to the time of compliance, and one that cannot completely escape it. As much as the document centers critical perspectives from the field, there are continuing traces of the demand for outcomes that are easily measured. Rather than offering librarians only ‘big concepts’ with which to grapple as teachers and scholars, the final text provides defined knowledge practices and dispositions that are as subject to critique as the performance indicators in the Standards. Both documents offer universal outcomes and indicators in the Standards, even as the Framework takes pains to present them as only a set of options. The Framework attempts to move away from data gathering and compliance,

but cannot get totally out from under those aspects of compliance culture. Academic librarians (and our professional associations) do not only occupy the kairos of critique. We also require tools that can help us meet the institutional demands for data that mark the kairos of compliance.

The Framework tells a story about itself that sets it apart from the structural and institutional forces that produced the Standards. This story casts the Framework as the product of an exceptional present that is “rapidly changing” and “dynamic and often uncertain,” requiring a “richer, more complex set of core ideas” to guide professional practice (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016). Even as the Framework sets itself apart from the fixed and mechanistic approach of the Standards, it still fixes things in place: the Frames, for example, and the “foundational ideas.” This is a kind of textual anxiety produced in part by the effort to straddle two impulses: the desire to center the concerns of critical pedagogy and move the field of information literacy and academic librarianship toward a kairos of the critical, as well as the need to help librarians meet the demands of this time of compliance. The Framework is a centralized, consensus document that emerges from the professional center. It transforms intellectual work meant to promote reflection about the philosophy and practice of teaching into a codified set of foundational ideas. While the Framework emphasizes that local information literacy learning outcomes ought to be developed locally, the Framework defines—even standardizes—the “big ideas” against which individual librarians should develop them. Librarians who share a certain critical, Marxist perspective may find the articulation of information as a commodity under capitalism compelling and true. Others may not. The universalizing and standardizing that even the Framework does is in part a structural effect of its status as a document codified by a professional association in a higher education environment that demands the measurable, the reportable, and the quantifiable. This effect cannot be sidestepped simply by claiming to be outside of standards-making.

What, then, can be done by librarians who seek to contest the kairos of compliance? Academic librarians working information literacy find themselves in interesting times. The promise of critical pedagogy enlivens our discourse and practice as more of us spend professional time imagining, discussing, and then trying out ways of teaching that help students understand the political economy of information. On the other hand, data gathering, analysis, and reporting continue to be institutionally important realities of the

work, whether the individual librarian believes in their efficacy or not. The capacity to engage in quantifying program-level learning outcomes that are linked to various professional and accreditation standards in the profession can translate into significant material resources of libraries and librarians. Responding to the demands of the kairos of compliance while working toward a future kairos grounded in a critique of compliance poses an analytic and practical challenge for teaching librarians. Understanding our actions as complexly and compellingly formed by these two competing conceptions of the present might usefully inform the actions we take toward a more just and equitable future.

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