

# Journal of Information Literacy

ISSN 1750-5968

Volume 3 Issue 2

December 2009

## Article

Whitworth, A. 2009. Teaching in the relational frame: the Media and Information Literacy course at Manchester. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 3(2), pp. 25-38.

<http://ojs.lboro.ac.uk/ojs/index.php/JIL/article/view/PRA-V3-I2-2009-2>

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# Teaching in the relational frame: the Media and Information Literacy course at Manchester

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## Abstract

Bruce, Edwards and Lupton (2007) define the “relational frame” of information literacy (IL) education as one within which all other frames can be integrated, from the “content” and “competency” frames which are based on objective measures, through learning-based frames which are subjective, to an intersubjective, social impact frame. Put more simply, they propose that IL education and application can and should vary in form depending on the context. Through analysis of the critical and social theory which supports Bruce et al’s ideas, and through a brief case study of a postgraduate course built from these theories, this paper proposes that the relational frame of IL can, and should, be applied to the teaching of “multiliteracies”. If relational IL education means, for example, that students should experience variation in their approach to information searching and evaluation, then this implies they must be able to understand underlying value systems which provoke such searches, like environmentalism or religion. The relational frame of IL therefore serves as a bridge between IL and multiliteracies.

## Keywords

information literacy; relational frame; critical; schemes of value; multiliteracies

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## 1. Introduction

This paper is based around an initiative at the University of Manchester, UK, which teaches critical information literacy and multiliteracy skills to postgraduates. The *Media and Information Literacy* course unit (hereafter, *M&IL*) is part of the MA programme in Digital Technologies, Communication and Education (2009), which has the overall learning objective of enhancing the use of digital technologies, the broadcast media, and/or interpersonal, group or organisational communications techniques to enhance practice and the professional and academic development of educators in technology-rich environments. The *M&IL* unit has been recognised as an exemplar in the JISC-funded Learning Literacies in a Digital Age (LLiDA) (2009) project. It was specifically mentioned in the final summary report (Beetham, McGill and Littlejohn 2009, p. 42) as a rare integration of the teaching of media literacy with information literacy (IL) and other learning literacies, an observation which will be developed in this paper.

I discuss the theory and pedagogical rationale behind this course, drawing partly on work presented in a recently-published book and at LILAC 2009 (Whitworth 2009a; 2009b). *M&IL* is presented as an example of how teaching can operate within the *relational* frame of IL education (Bruce et al 2007). Two observations must be made at

this early stage, however, to clarify the paper's intention. First, the course is presented as an example of curriculum design and although mention is made of student contributions to the course, these are presented as illustrations of certain pedagogical strategies employed by the author. This discussion is therefore presented from the teacher's point of view as the wider impact of the course on students' information literacy and multiliteracy skills goes beyond the scope of this paper.

Second, the examples provided are drawn from a wider literacy field than IL alone. However, the paper will demonstrate that the course strengthens the case for the relational frame, by illustrating how the frames are connected both to each other and to different conceptions of informational value used in real-world situations. To be communicatively competent in the information age (Whitworth 2007) requires learners to be able to move between frames, as appropriate. As a consequence, information literacy education that is rooted in the relational frame expands into multiliteracy by definition. Effectively, the relational frame of IL serves to bridge IL and multiliteracies. This claim will be explored by the paper.

## 2. Theory

IL is not itself a theory of learning. This means that "people's approaches to IL and IL education are informed by the views of teaching, learning and IL which they adopt either implicitly or explicitly in different contexts" (Bruce et al 2007, p. 37). Bruce et al developed the six frames of IL as a "conceptual tool" (2007, p. 39) to aid analysis of the differences between particular contexts, with reference to how information, curriculum, learning, teaching, content and assessment (2007, p. 40) are viewed in these different frames.

Bruce et al (2007, pp. 40-42) start by describing the "content" and "competency" frames in which IL is conceived of as competencies and skills. The focus is on what learners know about IL, what they can do with it and at what level of competence. In these frames, learners' IL skills are assessed by quantifiable and objective measures such as how much has been learnt and how well learners perform information-based activities. Next, there are more personal, and thus subjective views, in which learning in diverse contexts is promoted, and self- and peer-assessment emphasised. These are represented by the "learning to learn" and "personal relevance" frames. The focus is on how IL has informed learning and/or how learners use it to approach educational problems. Finally, they describe critical and transformative views. The "social impact" frame represents the application of IL skills to help communities solve significant problems, assessed in ways which are "designed to encourage experience of the impact of IL" (Bruce et al 2007, p. 41: see also Whitworth 2009a, pp. 195-8 for an example).

Ultimately, Bruce et al (2007, p. 42) recognise that information is experienced, and thus filtered and evaluated, within *all* of these frames at different points in the learning and teaching process. Each is therefore, at least potentially, a contributor to communicative competence, and may be appropriate at particular times. True literacy is multifaceted, a view supported by Beetham et al in the LLiDA report who say it is wrong to "imply a single model of digital competence rather than the multiple modes of engagement, varieties of digital scholarship, and numerous specialist applications, which characterise the academic experience." (Beetham et al, 2009, p. 67)

With reference also to the work of Bowden and Marton (1998, p. 154), the relational frame, broadly, is the frame in which students “explore variation” (Bruce et al 2007, p. 51) in the way they conceptualise and experience information literacy. This is achieved by engaging with the other five frames as appropriate (Bruce et al 2007, p.43):

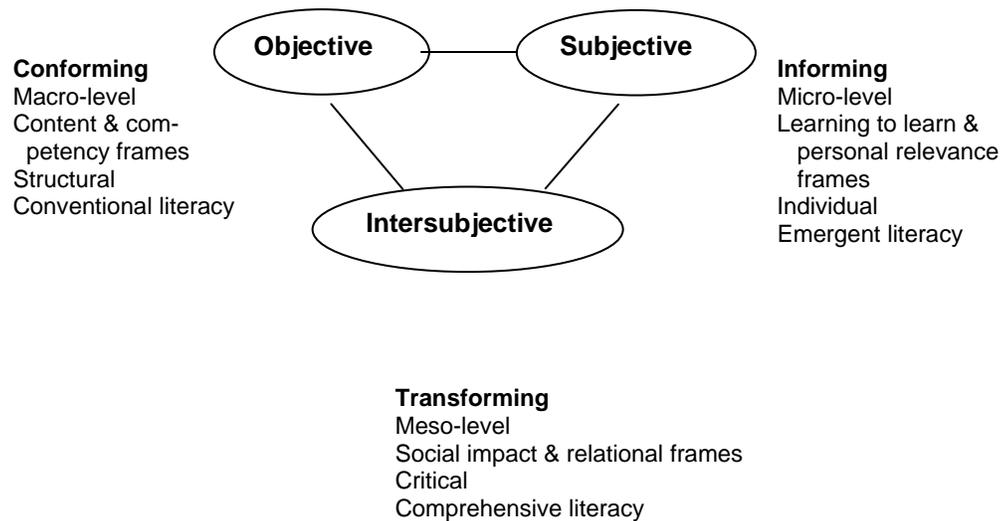
students experience information literacy in a range of ways that are more or less complex or powerful. [...] information literacy is not a set of skills, competencies and characteristics. It is a complex of different ways of interacting with information which might also include:

- knowledge about the world of information (content frame)
- a set of competencies or skills (competency frame)
- a way of learning (learning to learn frame)
- contextual and situated social practices (personal relevance frame)
- power relationships in society and social responsibility (social impact frame).

This holism makes the relational frame a challenging one to design for. The basic principle is not too hard to state, as it involves course design and assessment that require students to identify differences between searching and filtering strategies (see Bruce et al 2007, pp. 44-50, particularly p. 48). But this involves transcending IL as it is usually defined. For example, the American Library Association (1989) say that: “...to be information literate, a person must be able to recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information.” This places the student as the originator of the informational need as well as the agent of the search and evaluation process. But, as I will discuss shortly, we are not always consciously aware of the motivations which lie beneath our informational needs. Students must investigate and, if necessary, self-criticise the values, assumptions and needs which have driven the information search in the first place (cf. Whitworth 2009a, pp. 172-5). Students must be aware of multiple literacies in order to be information literate. This claim is developed further below, in the Practice section of this paper.

The following figure shows the relationship between the frames. They are arranged in a way that shows the frames’ equality and interdependence on one another. The frames have been further grouped by making connections with the different schemes of *valuing* information presented by Whitworth (2009a), that is, objective, subjective and intersubjective, as well as Egan’s classification of literacies (1990, pp. 41 ff), as conventional, emergent and comprehensive.

**Figure 1: Three domains of information literacy**



The remainder of this section of the paper draws on political theory to elaborate on the claim that the omission of any one of these three domains leads to distortion of information and, ultimately, to a failure to instill “communicative competence” within learners (Whitworth 2007). The intention here is to provide critical theoretical justification and depth for Bruce et al’s claims about the importance of the relational frame. I believe that IL education, as a general field of activity and study, can only benefit from rooting itself in the long tradition of political theory which helps explain how our ability to process information can be used to empower and transform our lives, organisations and communities.

Content- and competency-based measures of teaching IL fall within a frame that emphasises objective forms of value. Success in an information search is measured by how efficiently a search is completed. Criteria can be developed against which this performance can be objectively and quantitatively measured, and these assessment criteria can be applied, largely, without concern for the particular context in which the information search takes place, hence, objectively. It is this ‘one size fits all’ approach to IL education which is implicitly criticised as limited by Bruce et al, and by Andretta (2006, p. 1) as it does not permit the subjective elements of IL to come to the fore and thus make the information search personally relevant to diverse learners.

There is another way, however, in which the value of information can be measured objectively. The body of knowledge developed through the processes of scientific method, that is, evidence-based, hypothesis-driven and peer reviewed, has been pre-validated, through methods that avoid subjectivity. Thompson (2008, *passim*) observes that these processes have not been followed by all forms of information which are available in the digital age. He terms as “counterknowledge” what he considers superstitions and fallacies such as creationism, pseudohistory, many alternative therapies, conspiracy theories and so on. All of these, particularly in an era characterised by the increase in user-generated content, are considered to not just represent a dumbing down of public debate, but an active degradation of the intellectual tools

available to learners (see Keen 2007). It seems apparent that some form of IL is required in order to help learners separate objectively valuable information from counterknowledge. Training in IL should therefore include an investigation of the principles of scientific method.

But objective value on its own does not provide an effective information filtering strategy. In the first place, while science can be objectively validated, it exists within intersubjective social structures (such as market forces and the career needs of scientists). These social structures can ossify into paradigms that block the free flow of new ideas (Kuhn 1970). Market forces can also distort information into counterknowledge, and Thompson (2008, pp. 94-116) partly blames the spread of counterknowledge on its value to, for example, the publishing and health industries. IL must not then present the sphere of knowledge as an objective space in which scientific rigour is the only criterion for validation, but as one which can be structurally transformed by the operations of steering media like money and power (Habermas 1984/1987; 1989). In addition, some motivations, such as aesthetics, will always be powerful motivations for action, and can be considered *rational* ways of filtering information, but remain innately subjective (Whitworth 2009a, pp. 72-4).

At one remove, claims that a particular field of experience lacks objective value, and is thus “counterknowledge”, must also be objectively analysed. Most may agree that there is a lack of real value in pseudohistorical claims that lost civilisations existed prior to the last Ice Age (Thompson 2008, pp. 48-70), but as Whitworth (2009a, pp. 73-4) points out, Thompson’s more half-hearted dismissal of aromatherapy (2008, p. 76) can be at least partly challenged by the existence of peer-reviewed papers in medical journals which show that a combination of massage and plant oils can, in some circumstances, have clinical value (e.g. Furlan et al 2002; Bassett et al 1990). Ideally, *critical reflection on claims to objectivity* (Egan 1990, pp. 143-4) investigates *all* claims with reference to “technical resources to aid thinking” (Egan 1990, p. 2) which include scientific method but which must also include subjective and intersubjective methods as well. All, collectively, constitute filters for the information around us.

The difficulty lies in moving away from a ‘one size fits all’ approach to IL education, without collapsing into the kind of relativism and counterknowledge that Thompson rightly castigates. Classic definitions of IL such as the Association of College and Research Libraries’ (ACRL) (2000) do move beyond the idea of quantifiable, objective “competencies” in IL and into a more subjective approach, in which the individual learner is not only the agent of IL, but the *driver* of the information search and evaluation. In this definition the implication is that the learner is in control of the process, from defining the information need, to conducting the search, evaluating and then using found information. But by placing the individual as the agent and driver of IL, the ACRL definition risks being unable to combat relativism, beyond a vague appeal to ethics and legal frameworks included in their definition. As Whitworth (2009a, p. 117) points out, seeking information on illegal activities, like the manufacture of bombs or poison, could be done in an information literate way and therefore the underlying value systems which provoke the information search must be made explicit.

This shows the importance of the intersubjective valuing of information. Value structures such as ethics and morals are an essential part of society’s information filtering systems, and are innately intersubjective (Habermas 1984/1987). Nor can a purely subjective

approach (or, when dealing with morals, an objective, scientific one) identify the ways information is filtered before it even reaches the individual. That is to say, the individual is *not* free to define their own information need, nor to evaluate found information against all relevant criteria. There are two connected reasons for this, one which lies at the level of individual cognition, the other with organisations and other social structures.

The root of the problem lies in the *cognitive biases* which are innate to all human information processing, and which have been confirmed by scientific observation (see Blaug 2007; Whitworth 2009a, pp. 143-6). Cognitive biases are important parts of our mental, information-processing architecture. They help us join the world and act decisively. But they can also create damaging feedback loops in both individuals and organisations, resulting in failures to learn (Blaug 2007). Cognitive biases include the affirmational bias, where we exaggerate our own abilities, remember successes as being through our own efforts but dismiss failures as caused by external factors beyond our control, and the confirmational bias where we expect things to conform to patterns, including pre-existing cognitive schema in our minds. Thus, we notice data or information that confirm our existing opinions or beliefs, and simply fail to notice that which challenges them. Finally, there is the reification bias, which causes us to see social constructions as natural and real. This contributes to stereotyping, and also to a failure to question certain implied goals of action, particularly when these become embedded into wider organisational structures that may range from an employer or computer system up to the level of the global economy.

These alone suggest that a learner, working on information without further validation and/or guidance, does not have a 'free mind' when it comes to filtering, sorting and evaluating all information. ACRL imply this by saying that the information literate actor should "incorporate found information into their knowledge base and a value system" (ACRL 2000). Such things *must* exist prior to the commencement of the information search, but ACRL do not explore the implications of this.

Blaug goes on to show how hierarchical organisations exploit these cognitive biases. In some ways this is a strategic, conscious process on behalf of those who wield power in any organisation. Denying or repressing the cognitive work done by subordinates is characteristic of many organisational relationships. While employees are exhorted to be creative and information literate, their activities may be restricted by job descriptions, performance criteria and so on. These kinds of constraints, as well as values, goals and cultural assumptions, become reified into the technologies and organisations which form the external information-processing architecture within which most individual activity takes place, and which, therefore, increasingly define personal, subjective identities (cf. Wenger 1998, p. 232). Organisations "push" cognitive schema (ways of thinking) at their members: the organisation's information processing thereby comes to substitute for the individual's own (Blaug 2007, pp. 37-8).

Of course, information can be validated with reference to an organisational need. This is why the word *conforming* was used in figure 1. It is not the case that all such needs are damaging to an individual. There are many occasions where the information retrieved has to be validated against objective measures such as how effective it will be in a given application or whether or not it is scientifically valid. Therefore, conforming to cognitive schema developed within organisations cannot always be considered as a sign of passivity and a lack of learning. But such conformity can turn into what Blaug calls

“battery cognition” (2007, p. 38) if an individual is no longer *consciously aware* of the ways in which their cognition, in this case, the criteria against which information is filtered, has been delegated to another agent (e.g. an organisation, a technology, a reified social structure like a paradigm). Individuals and communities can, for sure, often see benefits in reifying information filters in this way. Without doing so, we would not store found knowledge in organisations or technologies at all, and thus could not progress as a civilisation. But this delegation should have a continuously provisional character, being constantly validated by both the individual and the communities of which he or she is part (Habermas 1993). We need to be vigilant over the costs of hierarchy, observing, managing and minimising its costs (Blaug 2007, p. 40) at the same time as we need to reap some of its benefits.

Where individuals or communities are engaged in inspection of the underlying values that are driving and shaping debate and decision-making in a given setting, *double-loop learning* is occurring (Argyris 1999). Where this process of intersubjective validation gives rise to awareness and critique of tensions or contradictions in the surrounding technosocial environment, *transformative learning* may occur (Mezirow 1990). Hence, Bruce et al’s “social impact” frame, in which the “teachers’ role is to challenge the status quo [and] learning is about adopting perspectives that will encourage social change... IL can inform widespread or important social issues or problems” (Bruce et al 2007, p. 41). Students are no longer merely “informed”, nor “conforming”, instead they are working to transform the environments and communities within which they are active.

In summary then, the information literate actor ideally uses all three forms of value in a complex relation: objective, subjective and intersubjective. All are necessary:

- remove objective value, and we risk the spread of counterknowledge, either between individuals or through communities; indeed, communities can become defined around counterknowledge (see Thompson 2008, particularly pp. 1-23);
- remove subjective value and we have institutionally-pushed knowledge—full “battery cognition” in Blaug’s terms—a passive acceptance of what organisations and society push at us, which represents a clear threat to democracy and democratic thinking (Blaug 2007, p. 38);
- remove intersubjective value and we lose criticality and transformation, the social aspects of learning and activity, an ability to recognise the value inherent in the different approaches of others (even when these are not appropriate in one’s own context) and hence learn through creativity and synergy.

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### 3. Practice

The *M&IL* course aims to develop in students an understanding of the relational frame of IL. To summarise the argument of the previous section, this requires both students and teacher to:

- explore and experience a variety of information searching strategies;
- expand IL into multiliteracies, gaining an understanding of the values (such as environmentalism and religion: cf. the activities below) which drive information needs and the strategies used to fulfil them;
- understand how all of these literacies can be expressed, and related activities evaluated, in objective, subjective and intersubjective ways.

One significant course activity is described here in detail. This takes place early in the course in order to illustrate the importance of the relational frame for the students, and demonstrate that it is more than just a theoretical construct. This framework is then used in the remainder of the course to analyse the multiliteracies discussed therein (cf. Beetham et al 2009), as well as the primary subjects (media literacy and IL).

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#### Activity: Defining literacies

[...]

Think of one actual or potential literacy. It could be directly mentioned in this week's readings, for example, health; financial; scientific literacy ... It could be another of which you have heard but which has not so far come up here. Or it could be one you invent yourself, if you think there is a need (this would be the hardest to do, but also, probably, the most productive in learning terms).

Produce a general definition of what the literacy involves and why it is needed. [**Note:** to save space, answers to this part of the activity have not been included in the samples below]

Then think of it in terms of the three "stages of development": a functional version of the literacy; an interpretive, interactive or personal one; and finally a critical one. (See the example).

[...]

#### Example: Environmental Literacy

This provides an illustration and is not a definitive definition of this term. It is based partly on St Clair (2003), but also on my own feelings and views.

[...]

*A functional view:* Environmental literacy would involve awareness of good environmental practice, defined mainly as adherence to laws, helping councils and companies meet environmental targets, reducing costs. Employers, particularly for certain jobs (e.g. in the public sector) may in future expect that entrants can prove their level of "environmental literacy" with some form of qualification.

*An interpretive or personal view:* Learners would be encouraged to become environmentally literate in order to enhance their quality of life. Reducing their own waste and increasing the efficiency of homes and lifestyles will produce both financial gain and moral satisfaction. They will also better understand the reasons why environmental legislation exists and how this can be turned into something with positive impacts on their lives, rather than treating these as costs or unnecessary burdens. The aim would be to develop individuals who were flexible and adaptable in the face of environmental change.

*A critical view:* Environmental literacy is the foundation of sustainability. Without transformed practice at all levels from the micro- to the macro-, a sustainable society cannot be achieved. Individuals must develop both an awareness of how they and their communities can nurture these environments, and also of how to transform the dehumanised economic and legislative practices which, as they become more removed from specific local environments, thereby turn them more into abstract constructs and thus make it more likely they will be exploited in unsustainable ways. Environmental literacy therefore also must include an awareness of the destructive basis of modern economics, an investigation of how value can and must be

assigned to local environments, and increasing awareness of strategies for political activism, legal rights in this regard, and so on.

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Although I am making this connection after the fact (in other words, it was not a justification for the course designer picking 'environmental literacy' as the illustrative example here), note how this particular literacy could serve as the driver of informational searches and filtering strategies which involve environmental issues, and how the strategies used to conduct and evaluate the search would differ depending on whether environmentalism was viewed functionally, personally or critically. Compare this with "case B" presented by Bruce et al (2007, pp. 50-1 drawing from the original research by Lupton 2004). Lupton investigated how students researched essays in environmental studies courses, and found that IL could be applied to researching environmental problems without concern for the actual nature of environmentalism. A functional view would not see this as problematic because, from this perspective, environmentalism simply produces an informational need which can be met in context-independent ways. Only through the personal and critical views can the need be seen as stemming from wider, ethical and moral considerations of value. Lupton saw that this deeper kind of insight required students to "look beyond the topic to the field and discipline" (Bruce et al 2007, p. 51), in this case, to understand the nature of environmentalism itself and how the information need emerged from it. Hence, the claim of this paper that the relational frame of IL must make explicit connections between IL and other multiliteracies as relevant: in this case, environmental literacy.

In the 2008-9 offering of *M&IL* the following contributions were made in response to this activity, as two students and, later, the course tutor, tried to define a new term "*religious literacy*" (this term was chosen by the one of the students rather than assigned by the tutor)

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Contributor 1 (a British language teacher studying at a distance from Hong Kong):

**A functional view**

Religious literacy would involve an understanding of world religions, their history and the cultures in which these religions have grown. It would also be important to disassociate moral codes from religion – that being a good person has nothing to do with the religion that someone adheres to. [...]

**A personal view**

At a personal view an individual would be able to balance their own views with those of others without presuming that their beliefs are necessarily better or more valid. An aim of mutual respect for all peoples would be the pinnacle of religious literacy.

**A critical view**

Communities and individuals must develop an approach that leads to peaceful co-existence. Religious literacy must include an awareness of the reasons why religious belief has evolved, how some people use religion to oppress, scare and cajole and the impossibility to prove anything right or wrong until it's too late to take part in the discussion.

Contributor 2 (a South African secondary school teacher):

**A functional view**

I agree that it would include an understanding of world religions and belief systems, their history and the cultures in which these religions have grown. Also including here perhaps the current status, growths and declines in numbers etc. It could also be added here that it would include the use of basic reading and writing skills to discover, understand and follow the ideas of and behind different belief systems.  
[...]

**A personal/cultural view**

At a personal view an individual would be able to use more advanced literacy, cognitive and interpersonal skills to try to compare and if possible, balance their own views with those of others. Using the words of this weeks reading this view would include a 'competence with the meaning system of social practices' ; understanding the beliefs and following actions in 'relation to context and the appropriateness of' ways of making meaning of life.

**A critical view**

I would aim this at the fact that individuals should be encouraged to ACTIVELY discover and question their own belief system, is it of own choice or imposed by a power to whom it will be beneficial if you hold to these beliefs? Questioning and investigation could lead to the awareness of motivation and drive behind personal actions and decisions. This in turn could lead to the awareness of how personal belief systems are interconnected within cultures, contexts, institutions and how these all bring to a context their own set of values, rules, purposes that might exclude others.

Just being aware of your own assumptions, beliefs and being critical about it might naturally lead to a curiosity of the critique on others' beliefs, which all together could lead to situations of respectful co-existence or situations of 'agreeing to disagree' (accommodation)

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Contributor 3 (a member of the course teaching team):

**Functional:** people who work in public service, council offices, the police, education etc. need to be aware of anti-discrimination laws, what would be considered offensive by members of some religions (making sure men do not shake the hands of married Muslim women, for example), things like holy days, etc.

**Personal:** the knowledge of culture and history one might need to appreciate comparative religion, enjoy the world's diversity, etc. (My son, age 5 now, spent quite a bit of last term learning about Hinduism, Diwali, their belief system and Gods, etc. - a good thing I think). It is almost as if people were being given the skills to make a free choice as to which religion they follow.

**Critical:** an understanding of how these beliefs can be perverted by those (from any culture) seeking power and, thus, with an interest in promoting fear and conflict; an understanding of critical debates about religion, from outright condemners (is that a word?) like Dawkins, through critics of (for example) the rise of creationism, like Damian Thompson... to defenders of the role of religion in, e.g., rooting core values and moralities, promoting art and architecture, etc.

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Particularly in this last case, compare these functional, personal and critical definitions with the ideas of, respectively, *conforming*, *informing* and *transforming* illustrated in figure 1. Contributor 3 distinguishes between the need to *conform* to objective legal

standards of environmentalist behaviour, established 'objectively' rather than by the learner; to *inform* oneself of relevant and/or interesting information about the field; and to *transform* the structures and values of individuals and society if these risk corrupting the positive aspects of religious belief. To undertake a fully critical information search on any aspect of religion would require learners to be conversant with each of these levels of 'religious literacy'. A similar argument applies to 'environmental literacy' as defined above and, potentially, to other multiliteracies when viewed in this relational way.

M&IL students are assessed not through demonstrating information (or media) literacy skills directly. In line with the learning outcome of enhancing their professional practice in technology-rich environments, students compile a portfolio of activities through which they might teach media and IL to others. Partly this pays tribute to the aphorism "To teach is to learn twice", first attributed to Joseph Joubert, and then alluded to in Whitman's report on "peer teaching" (Whitman 1988), of which this assessment is, in part, an example. But the aim is also to position their work within the relational frame, through giving learners a chance to explore (and thereby justify) variation in IL teaching strategies, as four different activities are expected in the portfolio. Students are also expected to demonstrate an understanding of the theoretical background to IL, as explored in the latter part of section 2 above.

The summary assignment description is as follows:

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The assignment for M&IL requires you to put together a portfolio of 4 teaching and learning activities which will assist learners in developing an understanding of any issues raised by this course.

However, these activities will form only a part of your full submission. They should be "wrapped" up in a commentary that explains and justifies their choice, and general design, with reference to some theories introduced in this course such as cultural studies, the public sphere, foundations (and critiques) of media and information literacy, problem-based learning, critical social science and so on (this is not necessarily a complete list).

[...]

You should have a specific target audience in mind for your activities, though this can be defined quite broadly if you wish. At the very least you should determine whether your portfolio of activities is intended for younger or older learners. The audience may also be specific to particular contexts, whether that be a school or university subject, a particular professional group, a local or interest-based community, or even a specific organisation. If you do target a specific subject, this does not have to be "Media Studies" or something similar, though it could be. You might also explore the need for Media & IL within a different subject, like science or history. Also note that the setting for your activities does not have to be a formalised educational one.

The activities should be *coherent*, but that does not necessarily mean that they need to be linked. What I mean by that is that they should share a target audience and should all be justifiable together: that is, that a common philosophy (developed and explored through your commentary) should underlie all four. However, they may be linked in the sense that each builds on the previous one: or they may be essentially separate and self-contained. Which of these is appropriate will be a design decision that you have to take, and justify.

Across the four activities considered as a whole, you are encouraged to cover functional, personal and critical aspects of literacy.

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The intention of this assessment is to encourage students:

- to develop activities within more than one frame of IL (and/or media or other literacies)
- to address the economic, social, scientific and political constraints which shape the public sphere, and show they understand both the practicalities and theories which are important here (macro-level)
- to allow them to address their own local, professional context through designing IL activities they can later go on and use (micro-level).
- The meso-, community-level aspect of IL is addressed in the activity through peer teaching, whereby in the weeks prior to the deadline, at least one activity per portfolio is tested, and evaluated, by one or more colleagues.
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#### 4. Conclusion

Due to space constraints this paper can only sketch how *M&IL* locates itself within the relational frame. In particular, no mention has been made of the parts of the course which address scientific method and counterknowledge, despite having stressed their importance in the theory section. These issues will be dealt with in future publications. Nevertheless the account presented here gives a flavour of the course and the rationale behind it.

Bruce et al (2007) do an excellent job of outlining the impact of the relational frame of IL on information literate *actors*, whether defined as individuals (subjective) or communities (intersubjective). I believe, though, that their paper does not explicitly show how the critical aspects of IL, and thus its transformative potential, can be incorporated in IL teaching and staff development. I hope that through this summary of one initiative, I have expanded on and clarified their definition of the relational frame, and shown both how it can absorb more critical, transformative approaches to teaching and learning, and be applied to the study of multiple literacies. I believe, indeed, that the relational frame acts as a bridge between IL and multiliteracy, as students must be seeing their information searches as driven by values, needs and assumptions reified into the multiple value systems of society. The critical frames of IL education therefore require students to at least understand, if necessary, work to transform many domains in a multiliterate way.

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