The Language We Use to Describe Learners:
An Exploratory Review

Rosemary Green
Shenandoah University
Winchester VA

CAPAL 2015

Information literacy:
Our trademark practice

- Problems created by information illiteracy **(Zurkowski 1974)**

- *Coping with Information Illiteracy (***LOEX 1989)**

- An information literate person is one who achieves information literacy (**ACRL 2000)**

- Historical reviews

  - Aharony 2010

  - Gunselman & Blakesley 2012

  - Pinto, Cordon, & Diaz 2010

A troubling dichotomy

- We are the experts in information literacy skills (**Yee 1989)**

- Information illiterate' means the lack of skills encompassed by information literacy **(Thompson 2003)**

- The negative term 'information illiteracy' is derived from the positive form 'information literacy' **(Perelman 2008)**

- Therefore, a person is either information literate or information illiterate.

Who are information illiterate people?

- Lazy, deficient users of information in need of a cure **(Shanbhag 2007)**

- Mandates for information literacy presume that students are not information literate **(Norgaard 2003)**

- The rhetoric of information illiteracy conveys our expertise, an unsettling dichotomy, and an assumption of need.

Them and Us

The condition of being illiterate is customarily assigned to one group (students), while the faculty's membership in the society of the literate is affirmed. **(Rose 1985)**

Unequal access to information

'Have-nots,' who, either by choice or circumstance, lack the skills and critical thinking needed to sort through the vast array of information, are excluded from fully participating in their education. Interestingly, the 'have-nots' might not realize that they are on the far side of the [digital] divide.

(Andreae & Anderson 2012)

A crisis rhetoric

- Information illiteracy is a national pandemic **(Warren 2011)**

- Information illiteracy makes it more difficult for [students] to differentiate between truth and falsehood. **(Perelman 2008)**

- How would anyone react to our labeling her / him as information illiterate?

How do we respond?

- Critical information literacy workers
  - Elmborg 2003, 2006
  - Kapitzke 2003
  - Luke & Kapitzke, 1999
  - Swanson 2004, 2010

- We privilege our own discursive realities **(Drabinski 2011)**

- The LIS community must pay more critical attention to language use **(Pawley 2003)**

Information literacy language

What does [sic] the term 'information literacy' and its approach to evaluation convey to people about their competence? How does this projected perception of competence affect people's feelings and motivation to take action towards information literacy? Is information literacy, both its terminology and practice, contributing to negative perceptions of competence in IL and consequently backfiring on its effectiveness? **(Lin 2010)**

Framework
…Learners who are developing their information literate abilities…

- Authority is constructed and contextual
  - Authority is open to challenge
  - We should be open to self-evaluation

- Information creation as a process
  - Such creations are valued differently in different contexts

- Information has value
  - Information privilege has consequences

Framework for IL for HE

- Research as inquiry
  - We should maintain open minds
  - We should maintain a critical stance

- Scholarship as a conversation
  - Power and authority structures privilege certain voices and information

- Searching as strategic exploration
  - We and our explorations are affected by cognitive, affective, and social dimensions

Therefore, if we are inclined, we will embrace a critical information literacy capable of turning its gaze inward and interrogating itself.

Thank you for attending

rgreen@su.edu