

Samantha LeGrand

Making Room

Integrating Students as Partners Pedagogy into the Framework

The Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education offers information literacy (IL) instructors structure to develop pedagogy, aiming to enhance student engagement in knowledge production and communal learning.¹ However, it remains instructor-centered, overlooking students' strengths and goals. In contrast, the Students as Partners (SaP) approach fosters shared respect, responsibility, and reciprocity as instructors and students co-create educational experiences.² SaP involves students earlier in pedagogical decision-making processes, reframing education as a relational, personally meaningful pursuit. SaP gives students greater agency as they learn how to learn as well as positively impact peers and instructors through academic work.

SaP pedagogy aligns with the Framework's original intent to empower students, and it more fully enacts the participatory principles necessary to achieve that goal. We can integrate SaP pedagogy into the Framework in two fundamental ways: (1) integrating relationally centered, asset-based language, leveraging unique experiences and dialogue; and (2) incorporating culturally relevant, transformative actions into the frames. Librarians collaborate with campus-wide stakeholders and are routinely positioned as both "experts" and "novice learners," depending on who we work with.³ Thus, librarians are situated to lead partnership-oriented educational reform in our uniquely varied pedagogical relationships. This article presents a theoretical framework exploring intersections in existing literature on the Framework and SaP pedagogy to offer insights into the possibilities of their combined application for enhancing IL teaching and learning outcomes.

Students as Partners Pedagogy

SaP pedagogy emphasizes shared and equitable outcomes between instructors and students as they co-create educational experiences. This reimagines traditional teaching, where instructors make decisions about the learning process before any interaction with students. SaP, conversely, necessitates interaction as asset-based and culturally relevant pedagogy. SaP frames education as a relationship and a mechanism for personal *and* communal impact.

Scholarship on SaP pedagogy shows positive outcomes from student-instructor partnerships.⁴ Partnerships develop authentic motivation and engagement as partners clarify their motivations and redefine classroom responsibilities. Transparent communication helps partners understand themselves and each other better. SaP scholarship emphasizes shared outcomes, documenting students' transformation into active learners and instructors into reflective practitioners.⁵

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Partnership has been defined as a “reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis.”⁶ Incorporating SaP pedagogy into the Framework moves beyond one-way teaching and oversimplifying complex IL concepts.⁷ Instead, student partnership facilitates dialogue about *why IL matters*, creates change, and democratizes decisions. Instructors can ask what knowledge practices students have honed that we, as experts, missed when creating the Framework. Co-developing IL with students should lead to transformative actions, applying collaboratively determined knowledge practices and dispositions to achieve beneficial outcomes for students, instructors, and communities.⁸

Student Agency in the Design of the Framework

The Framework updated IL teaching standards, shifting from skills-based to a theoretical approach, reenvisioning IL pedagogy as broader educational reform.⁹ This less prescriptive conceptual scaffolding encourages student agency and collaboration, aligning with SaP pedagogy.¹⁰ The Framework aims to develop students as “consumers and creators of information,” focusing on metacognition and self-direction.¹¹

The IL community has both embraced and critiqued the Framework.¹² It has successfully guided IL instructors to engage students in complex IL concepts, such as discussions about the contextual nature of authority.¹³ Its updated definition of IL offers opportunity for pedagogical student partnership, “emphasizing dynamism, flexibility, individual growth, and community learning” through reflective practice, critique of information processes, and ethical knowledge creation.¹⁴ The introduction even suggests involving students in pedagogical research but is the only explicit mention of instructor-student collaboration. Fully integrating SaP pedagogy could meaningfully engage students in collaborative IL development.

SaP complements the educational theory behind the Framework, and pedagogical partnership is needed to truly realize “information literacy as educational reform.”¹⁵ Moreover, while metaliteracy and student agency focus on individual growth, SaP is inherently collective and relational, enabling the Framework’s communal learning goal. SaP necessitates an asset-based, culturally relevant pedagogy. Because students take decision-making positions about curriculum and class policy—why, how, and what they learn—they bring more of themselves into learning processes.

Problematizing Student Agency in the Framework

Despite promoting student agency, the Framework relies on instructor-centered, deficit-based approaches. Traditional teaching prioritizes instructor expertise in determining learning outcomes, excluding students from educational decision-making. This can lead to misalignment between courses and students’ experiences, values, or goals. Paulo Freire critiqued this “banking model” where instructors hold authority and students passively receive knowledge. For truly empowering education, both parties should cultivate “critical consciousness”—awareness of injustice and, importantly, acting to address it.¹⁶ For the Framework to meaningfully empower students, we must first problematize some of its foundational premises, which suffer banking model pitfalls.

The frames employ an “experts vs. novice learners” comparison, suggesting experts have all necessary knowledge for successful interactions with information, whereas “novices” lack

knowledge, not recognized as offering anything in dialogue with expert instructors. Knowledge practices and dispositions instruct “learners who are developing their information literate abilities,” suggesting experts’ practices are fully developed with nothing further to learn. Instead, IL’s development could be described in terms of lifelong learning and instructors encouraged to model their own ongoing learning.

The frame Authority is Constructed and Contextual (ACC) exemplifies deficit-based language about (lack of) student knowledge: “*Experts know how* to seek authoritative voices but also recognize that unlikely voices can be authoritative, depending on need. *Novice learners may need to rely on* basic indicators of authority, such as type of publication or author credentials, *where experts recognize* schools of thought or discipline-specific paradigms”¹⁷ (emphasis added). This overlooks “novice” prior knowledge, motivations shaping their understanding of authority’s contextuality, or culturally specific contexts where “novices” might have greater expertise than instructors.

Michael Dudley’s interpretation of the ACC frame moves toward pedagogical partnership.¹⁸ In this application, the instructor explains the problematic Eurocentric and heteronormative nature of Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), contrasts them with justice-oriented Alternative Press Index (API) headings, and demonstrates heading bias while searching for student-suggested topics. Indeed, involving students in constructing searches brings them closer to classroom decision-making. However, integrating SaP pedagogy into the ACC frame could deepen students’ ownership of the learning experience.

For example, rather than situating students as IL novices by explaining biased headings to them, students could contrast LCSH and API headings themselves, discussing the significance of their findings. To implement transformative action, students could propose updates to headings for a personally significant topic, taking an authoritative position to better represent the knowledge and the community who created it. To even further embrace partnership, instead of an academic library focus, students could identify where representative knowledge organization is important to them, investigating how they might create change in that context. Perhaps they would choose to interrogate biased algorithms suppressing content from creators of color¹⁹ or university policies hindering transgender students from using chosen names.²⁰

In addition to the instructor-focused approach permeating the core content—the frames themselves—it is also evident in the Framework’s supplementary sections. They illuminate assumptions underpinning the Framework’s adherence to traditional student–instructor dynamics. The introduction and appendixes contextualize the Framework’s creation and provide guidance on implementation. These materials target traditional pedagogical decision makers: IL instructors, faculty, and administrators. Students were not involved in the Framework’s creation, nor included with campus stakeholders IL practitioners are urged to collaborate with, which starkly illustrates a problematic dichotomy: the Framework’s stated goal is increased student agency, but it perpetuates instructor-centered practices and deficit-based view of students.

For example, the introduction describes instructor-centered educational theory underpinning the Framework, looking to “an ongoing Delphi Study that has identified several threshold concepts in information literacy.”²¹ By definition, a Delphi study solely represents subject-matter-experts’ perspectives, missing valuable contributions of students’ lived experiences. Threshold concepts communicate a discipline’s values and peculiarities

from experts' consensus. But Ian Beilin explains, "While threshold concepts may have an important place in the process of learning, information literacy must demand that the concepts themselves be questioned as part of the critique of the structure of knowledge."²² There are distinct experiences on both sides of a threshold—crossing over, so to speak, changes your thinking, and it is difficult to recall how you thought on the other side. Therefore, we should question why students—key stakeholders in education—have not helped define "information literate" practices, documenting the threshold-crossing experience of learning them. Rather, threshold concepts may reinforce that students must "learn the rules" of disciplinary knowledge, individualistically focusing on mastering the existing system.²³ Conversely, Healy et al.²⁴ suggest pedagogical partnership requires being "(radically) open to and creating possibilities for discovering and learning something that cannot be known beforehand."

Integrating SaP into the Framework

We can address the Framework's deficit-based, instructor-centered approaches by integrating SaP pedagogy in two ways: (1) adopting relationally centered language, guiding students *and* instructors to learn and teach reciprocally; and (2) attending to the behavioral domain of learning, not just delivering content, but determining IL's significance for shaping future actions. Co-developing IL alongside students should lead to transformative actions that apply knowledge practices and dispositions beyond the classroom, benefiting students and communities. SaP pedagogy suggests two strategies: leveraging what students are *already doing* and acting upon what they would *choose to do* as they learn more. Guiding questions can support exploration of these strategies:

- What are students *already doing* with knowledge practices and dispositions? How can we incorporate explicit identification of student prior knowledge and cultural assets into the Framework?
- What would students *choose to do* with knowledge practices and dispositions? What outcomes would make IL valuable to students? What projects, skills, or experiences would they pursue with their growing information literacy?

Relationally Centered Language

Being "instructor-centered" or "student-centered" are not the only choices—education is not a zero-sum game. Relationship is at the core of education, and empowering students does not disempower instructors. Rather, both are empowered through embracing their unique and necessary roles in partnership.²⁵ Integrating relationally centered language into the Framework could move us toward a partnership approach where students and instructors leverage their unique assets to learn from and teach one another. Asset-based Framework language should be crafted in and for dialogue with students. SaP's structure of shared respect, responsibility, and reciprocity can guide these discussions within each frame.²⁶

- **Respect:** learners can be reframed as equal partners by identifying their valuable (though distinct) strengths and contributions in dialogue about the frame's concepts.
- **Reciprocity:** instructors can be reframed as co-learners by sharing what they don't know and modeling continuous learning.
- **Responsibility:** students and instructors can collaboratively decide on meaningful outcomes and demonstrations of learning.

Transformative Behaviors in IL Pedagogy

After integrating partnership-oriented language, SaP pedagogy enables transformative action by revisiting the knowledge practices and dispositions in conversation with students. The Framework addresses cognitive “knowledge practices” and affective “dispositions.”²⁷ The behavioral, action-oriented domain can be better leveraged for culturally relevant IL. What next steps will students take to enact meaningful change as they learn IL practices and mindsets? Learning can be collaboratively constructed to identify culturally relevant, asset-based actions informed by their developing IL.²⁸

To do this, each frame could include a third category—“transformative actions”—empowered by IL knowledge practices and dispositions. These experiential, participatory actions transform learners through their engagement with information and, in turn, learners transform the world around them.²⁹ Additionally, this could answer previous calls to integrate social justice and critical information literacy into the Framework.³⁰ Following its original intent to provide theoretical guidance, not prescriptive mandates, these transformative actions could be framed as general practices. The author suggests the following examples of partnership-oriented language each frame could include:

Learning communities of instructor and student partners collaboratively developing information literate practices might

- make shared decisions informed by...
- facilitate dialogue between...
- engage in peer teaching by sharing experience in...
- propose a change/solution to...
- engage with a community by learning about...
- collaborate to create a product that meets the needs of...

Conclusion

The Framework continues to powerfully influence IL pedagogy. To realize the Framework’s goals of student agency, embracing SaP pedagogy is necessary. Pedagogical partnership will enable librarians to enact another of the Framework’s core goals, realizing IL “as an educational reform movement.”³¹ Librarians are positioned to lead broader partnership-oriented educational reform through our uniquely varied campus relationships.³² As a profession, we can begin this transformation by adjusting the Framework’s expectations for students and instructors in IL pedagogy and practices. ¶

Notes

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