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Reclaiming IL

This chapter explores empirical examples of a radical approach to the teaching of IL, investigating the usefulness of narrative-based approaches to teaching: action research; Bakhtinian pedagogies, and more. It investigates what might be done inside the library, but also beyond it, in classrooms and workplaces, communities and families. Radical IL happens whenever the assumptions around which we base our learning and practice are called into question and scrutinised in democratic, participatory ways. Methods presented here help practitioners 'train their eyes' and see when others are doing it well, so these experiences can be evaluated and applied in a different context, as appropriate.

Key words: Teaching, decolonisation, creative understanding, action research, collaboration, transformation.

The synthesis of IL-as-learning and IL-as-practice is now complete. IL, or more precisely, information literate behaviour, can be defined as *practices that sustain learning and the potential for transformation within communities and their landscapes*. Radical IL is the subset of these practices which lift those potentials up into practice, transforming information landscapes through scrutiny and review of the cognitive authorities that penetrate them. As Hamelink noted, these practices are diametrically opposed to the 'pushing' of information *onto* communities: something that can now be defined, more precisely, as the design of information systems which do not accommodate the experiences and categories of user groups. Hamelink's critique was directed mainly toward the broadcast media, but the synthesis of learning and practice within radical IL shows how these hegemonic and colonising practices also work through many other arenas for information exchange, the structuring of information systems, and the use of centripetal forces in language.

Radical IL seeks to counter these tendencies, wherever they may be found, and thus reclaim the political heart of IL. It attends to how authority over texts can be redistributed in a landscape. Methods for exploring this, in and via practice, lie with critical phenomenographical approaches that attend to the experience of variation within the landscape but also recognise that not all of these experiences are granted equal potential to transform practice, and are able to reveal the reasons why they are not. Empirical examples of this approach will be explored in this chapter. Like Linell (2009, 387–8), however, I do not want to use the theoretical distinctions I have presented to assign all existing literature and/or practical work to one 'side' of the debate or the other: in his case monologism versus dialogism; in mine, institutionalised versus radical IL. Nor do I claim that all IL practitioners must now adopt radical practices, at least, if they want to attain certain political ends. What the framework should be used for is *learning to see*: as a way of noticing, assessing, and evaluating trends and examples of work, and casting judgment over whether such work is oriented to the scrutiny of cognitive authority (double-loop learning) or to its acceptance (single-loop).

What this final chapter must now do is to explore what this theory means for practice, offering guidance where it can (cf Blaug 1999a; 1999b). Radical IL is not presented as a new 'standard' or rubric, nor as a form of assessment or, generally, some new approach which all IL teaching must hurry to adopt. Radical IL is already happening, and has been for millennia. It happens whenever the assumptions around which we base our learning and practice are called into question and scrutinised in democratic, participatory ways. The theoretical discussion presented here, and the critical phenomenographical methods that emerge from it, help practitioners 'train their eyes' and see when others are doing it well, so these experiences can be evaluated and applied in a different context, as appropriate.

Radical IL is also a theory that suggests why change is difficult. Institutionalisation, authority in texts, and the presence of unscrutinised assumptions and values in many landscapes helps to explain why collaboration, whether between librarians and faculty or between communities and formalised educational institutions, has proven so elusive. It shows that any institution, by its very nature, restricts choice and thus becomes an information filter. At the same time, radical IL fully embraces the *possibility* of transformation in any social setting, and the information landscapes, genres, and personal constructs that drive these settings. It is not about designing practice, but learning to see the practices that exist, and understanding their consequences, experiencing

their variations, and facilitating transformation. It is not relativist: certain practices can be viewed as information illiterate, if they contribute to a reduction in learning capacity by closing off the exploration of alternatives (double-loop learning), or if they exclude certain communities from participation in information-processing activities and decisions which affect them. Critical theory must be premised on these kinds of practices, ones that diminish the negative effects and cognitive costs of authority (such as coercion, alienation, surveillance) in workplaces and communities. Ultimately, radical IL is a guide to remaining vigilant over direct democracy and small-scale decision-making, and assists the creation of decolonising forms of organisation and community-building, with a particular focus on the importance of the information landscape to these endeavours. It counters colonisation's tendency to separate capital (of all kinds, including financial, human and social capital, as well as capital in the Bourdeuian sense (Bourdieu 1990)) from the communities which have generated it.

Radical IL is political: but so is IL, and all social science in fact (Carr & Kemmis p. 144):

> Inevitably.... social science is political: what is done depends on the way social processes of knowing and doing in particular situations are controlled. Critical social science thus requires a political theory about social life and, equally importantly, about its own processes and their effects on social life. The political theory of critical social science is democratic and rests on Habermas's theory of communicative competence and, in particular, on the idea of rational communication in which decision-making is guided, not by considerations of power, but by the rationality of arguments for different courses of action.

Communicative competence, in this sense[1] (see also Whitworth 2007) is fed by the effective distribution of IL throughout a community – that is, distributing the ability to make reasonable and methodologically-valid judgments that sustain that community's information landscape into the future. As the foundation of practice, radical IL thus drives the "organisation of enlightenment [which] is the organisation of the learning processes of the group" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, 146). The development of context-specific, defensible, and rational forms of knowledge is absolutely essential to this. Social change demands that (Harding 1993, p. 50):

> (I)t is not only desirable but also possible to have that apparent contradiction in terms – socially situated knowledge. In conventional accounts, socially situated beliefs only get to count as opinions. In order to achieve the status of knowledge, beliefs are supposed to break free of – to transcend – their original ties to local, historical interests, values and agendas.

This 'breaking free' can take place when knowledge becomes expressed generically and monologically. And there are times when this must take place, or society would be mired in endless discussion. However, this process also contributes to colonisation, whereby the values, assumptions, and forms of thinking that shape generic knowledge become concealed within information systems. As a result, double-loop learning – scrutiny of not just the effectiveness of a decision, but the premises underlying that decision – becomes more difficult. Thus, information systems become less flexible: enquiries must be shaped according to the needs of the system, rather than the other way around. The system thereby denies resources to alternative perspectives, and a fuller experience of variation is more difficult. Monologism, single-loop learning, systems, and standards are all thus interconnected.

The colonisation of knowledge formation in this way can be – and often is – *decolonised,* based on epistemologies and methodologies that are dialogic, and methods that are practice- and practitioner-based. These enquiries redistribute authority over knowledge products. They also test and validate texts and systems (written, technological, cognitive) that are based on this knowledge. "Strong objectivity" (Harding 1993) therefore becomes not just a philosophical position, but a practical one, and critical phenomenography offers methods that permit such scrutiny. Such a view is questioning and critical, and emphatically not anti-scientific: instead, it strengthens and spreads valid scientific practice, while still permitting (indeed, impelling) critiques of the colonisation of science by the steering media of money and power. These kinds of critiques are essential for democracy (Angus 2001, 10): "When understood radically, democracy is about the processes of public decision-making to which economic, social and cultural institutions must be subjected in order to be legitimate and binding upon citizens. Such a radical concept of democracy is concerned to *judge* social, economic and political institutions, not presuppose their legitimacy." And (*ibid*, 48): "To confuse democracy with institutional arrangements is not only to put the cart before the horse, it is to miss the essence of the process altogether – which is movement and creativity, the desire for change, for inclusion."

Strong objectivity is not monologic, an attempt to *impose* a consensus; it is dialogic, polyphonic, dynamic, and challenging (*ibid*, 55). Access to good quality information is one capacity needed to sustain the democratic quality of a group's interactions and, thus, the distribution of authority throughout the landscape, but also needed are (Blaug 1999a, 145): opportunities for deliberation, that is, problems to address; fora of some kind in which the community can undertake the process of learning about itself, which may now include digital fora (see also Wenger et al 2009) but which are not limited to them; motivation, and good morale. These all help provide the necessary energy. Being information literate requires having access to good information, but it also requires these other resources. Money and formalised teaching and training can also be valuable resources, but as these are also conduits of colonisation, to accept them a group has to remain vigilant over the trade-offs which arise when they are used.

This kind of active, self-aware, democratic involvement in a broad range of communities and landscapes has been called "*deep*" citizenship: "the activity of the citizen self acting in a variety of places and spaces" (Clarke 1996, 3). Deep citizenship has no fixed beginning and end, no single conception of the 'good life', but a number of possible ones, dynamic potentials that can be manifested in a range of different locations and contexts (*ibid,* 18–20).

The remainder of this chapter investigates pedagogical approaches and locations which are already undertaking relevant work in this area. It discusses the importance of action research as a way of bridging the theory-practice gap, and examines the political pressures that will inevitably be brought to bear on a radical IL, discussing how these must become learning opportunities whenever possible. Because the book has been, in part, a critique of the institutionalisation of IL within the library, but has also acknowledged the depth of IL expertise that exists there, there are passages below which discuss the library in particular, but the general concerns of the chapter are broader. There is a need not only to discuss the potential contributions made by both formal and informal learning, but also the links between the two types, and how each can strengthen the other by helping with the scrutiny of each other's validity claims.

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Landscapes can be understood at a variety of ways. They can be examined according to generalisable principles. For example, in many valleys of northern England, it is not hard, once one knows what to look

for, to see evidence that proves glaciers covered the landscape relatively recently, but have now disappeared. Such evidence is not visible in, say, Queensland. One needs to know very few details about either context to draw this conclusion. Rather, one needs to be able to apply more generic rules, such as looking for U- rather than V-shaped valleys and items such as erratics (boulders left behind by retreating ice). This kind of knowledge, an active, but generalisable, awareness of one's surroundings, would in this case be based on a basic understanding of the 'objective' scientific discipline that is geology, but would still be developed in personal and subjective ways (see Bakhtin's (1986, 32) anecdote about Goethe).

However, to gain a more holistic, dynamic, and intimate appreciation of the landscape – to understand what it is like to actually *live* in the landscape – one cannot rely on summary data and generic enquiries. One must develop a deeper understanding of the specific context, a "chronotopic visualizing of locality and landscape" (Bakhtin 1986, 36). Both types of inquiry involve learning, but the second, situated type forces the inquirer to enter into dialogues with the sources and forms of knowledge existing within the landscape. It also requires more time and active involvement. Both types of inquiry would be facilitated by a teacher, but in the first case that role would probably be satisfied by a single person or textbook, whereas in the second case, the role of 'teacher' would spread throughout the community within the landscape, and into the landscape itself, in both its informational and natural forms.

We undertake both types of learning at different points in our lives. The latter type is slower, more diffuse and, for that reason, far less visible than the first, but it is also more fundamental. Knowing what constitutes cognitive authority in the first type of learning environment is important, but that knowledge must, in turn, be based on the sort of deeper understandings of the many information landscapes we encounter. It is at this deep level of understanding that radical IL works. As a result, it specifically effaces the difference between formal and informal education, between the office of 'the teacher' and the practice of 'teaching'. Hence the statement which ended chapter 7, also captured in the epigraph that appeared at the beginning of part 2, from the movie *Ratatouille* – "Anyone can cook".

That statement does need qualifying, however, in order to avoid relativism. While the statement that 'all can teach IL' is an inexorable consequence of the argument thus far, there remains a difference between teaching that is IL-oriented (and information literate in its own right), and teaching that is not. That is, there remain normative standards

against which practice can be judged. The statement "Anyone can cook" is explored in *Ratatouille* by the character of food critic Anton Ego. He originally disparages it, as he believes it trivialises the art of cooking: popularising the notion, in this context, of the "cult of the amateur" (Keen 2007). But by the end of the movie, stunned by the great meal he was served by the (rodent) protagonist, Ego is moved to say: "Not everyone can be a great cook, but a great cook can come from anywhere".

So it is with IL teaching. Anyone can do it, but it takes care, attention, and practice to do it well. It involves guiding and facilitating the exploration of an information landscape, so can involve both of the forms of knowledge formation discussed just above. The formal educational provider clearly has a role to play, but so must informal learning, and good or bad teaching can be found in both sectors. And the normative standards which govern good teaching are not to be found in the simple assignation of the role of 'teacher' in a particular context. Carr and Kemmis (1986, 89) write that: "... to describe somebody as 'teaching' is to implicitly appeal to a background of rules operative in a particular society which specify what is to count as teaching. Indeed they constitute the very possibility of teaching at all." These rules may be drawn in exclusionary ways, around the possession of certain qualifications, the membership of a certain subset of an organisation's employees (those whose job description specifies a teaching role), or generic, objective statements in the academic literature about what makes for effective teaching. Carr and Kemmis counter these generic rules by examining in detail how rules can also be *practice-based*. Good teaching practice means, in any setting, that teachers must also become researchers, reflecting on their practice rather than separating theory and practice from each other, depersonalising both (1986, 127) so research is done 'on' practice. Instead, research becomes integrated into practice.

As with teaching, the notion that 'research' is something esoteric, for initiates only, is ultimately part of the boundaries drawn in society around knowledge-formation; it is an expression of authority and may even be subconsciously perpetuated by the academic community (as discussed at the end of chapter 6, e.g. via Mark (2011)). In any case, it is this kind of continuous self-reflection and application of generic principles within one's own context that Carr and Kemmis hold up as the normative standards for good teaching practice. This is not to dismiss the usefulness of more quantitative and generic measurements of learning outcomes – such as grades – but emphasising practice rather than outcomes makes the point that desirable outcomes cannot arise without good practice underlying them.

Effective IL teaching takes place when the process of reflection and experience of variation is facilitated *within the learning environment*. The roles of 'teacher' and 'learner' within such an environment may at times be fixed and clear but they can also be dynamic and fluid: either way, the basis of the teaching is dialogue. The environment may exist within formal educational institutions, but it has the potential to arise in any social setting.

There exist many documented examples of teaching and educational practice that encourage students to explore variation in information, and/or draw on investigations of these methods to argue for transformation in practice, whether in higher education specifically (e.g. Whitworth, Fishwick & McIndoe 2011; Bruce et al 2007, 51–55; Hepworth and Walton 2009; Andretta 2012), or outside the academy (Sayyad Abdi et al 2013, Yates et al 2009). Studies of the *impact* of these practices are harder to find. Herein lies an issue with the genre that is the academic paper. These texts' conclusions cannot *evolve*: they should be judged as utterances to which practitioners can respond, but it is harder to judge the responses unless follow-up studies may take place. Indeed, where such follow-ups have been done, the response to such teaching may even be negative, as it has been with Andretta's project (2012). This invokes the more difficult questions, of how institutionalised biases against democratic and critical forms of knowledge-formation work to deny resources to alternative approaches like these, but that will be returned to below.

Technology skills are a factor, as many papers have discussed (Brandt 2001, Reffell and Whitworth 2002, Scoble 2011), but the retheorisation of IL conducted here has shown that digital literacy is included in IL: it is one aspect of it, just as are scientific literacy, media literacy, and so on. Technologies are texts, so can be read, critiqued, scrutinised. As a subset of IL, digital literacy needs to be developed in dynamic and holistic ways, not just skills-based, moving "from following steps to applying concepts" (Brandt 2001, 81), but that is beyond the scope of this book (see Whitworth 2009, however). Views of digital literacy development which are more in tune with radical IL have been propounded by Luckin and colleagues (2010), and Garnett and Ecclesfield's Emergent Learning Model (2012) applies similar ideas to the organisation of learning resources more generally: this model was adopted in the MOSI-ALONG project (see below).

A pedagogical approach to consider is one inspired by Bakhtin's notion of "creative understanding". A truly creative understanding of a text goes beyond understanding a text as the author intended. Indeed, it is the

act of understanding by other readers that really gives a text its potential, by imbuing it with multiple meanings: "creative understanding continues creativity, and multiplies the artistic wealth of humanity" (Bakhtin 1986, 142). While one can still recognise the authority invested in the author's creation of a text (hence the etymological similarity between the words 'author' and 'authority', just as there is a common root to 'community' and 'communication'), it is only by critiquing an author's intentions, and transcending them to some extent, that the full creative potential of communication is realised (Morson and Emerson 1990, 55):

> Outsideness creates the possibility of dialogue.... for any culture contains meanings that it itself does not know, that it itself has not realized; they are there, but as a *potential*.... Only dialogue reveals potentials. It does so by addressing them, by provoking a specific answer that actualizes the potential, albeit in a particular and incomplete way. At the same time, the questioner necessarily undergoes the same process, which helps him comprehend unsuspected potentials in his own culture. The process, then, is multiply enriching: it educates each side about itself and about the other, and it not only discovers but activates potentials. Indeed, the process of dialogue may itself create new potentials, realizable only through future activity and dialogue.

In this dialogic epistemology, neither side simply turns themselves into the image of the other – accepting authority unquestioningly – but both engage in dialogue. This is why the roles of 'teacher' and 'learner' become fluid and less clear. "As Bakhtin would say, intelligence is a matter not of the given but of the created" (Morson and Emerson 1990, 214); this creation is a *joint* project (Matusov 2011, 115[2]):

> The goal of education is not to make students have the same understanding as the teacher, but rather to engage them in historically valuable discourses, to become familiar with historically, culturally, and socially important voices, to learn how to address these voices, and to develop responsible replies to them without an expectation of an agreement or an emerging consensus.

Generally, appropriate pedagogical techniques will facilitate the experience of variation, guide the creation of an outcome space that will subsequently be relevant and useful to the community, and sustain their

ability to learn into the future. Good teaching practice would then be manifested in the ongoing scrutiny and review of these techniques, to make sure they remain appropriate and relevant.

It is not the place of this book to discuss radical IL pedagogy in detail. Many guides already exist to IL teaching (e.g. Mackey and Jacobson 2011, Hepworth and Walton 2009, Andretta 2005, Bruce 2008), and to reflective, constructivist, and critical pedagogy more generally (Loughran 2002; Shor 1996; Mezirow 1990). 'Bakhtinian' pedagogies have also been presented: see below, and also White (2009). Geijer & Olstedt (2009) invoke Bakhtin, and also Mezirow (1990), a writer with a critical perspective on staff development, in their discussion about the importance of dialogue in vocational education, aimed at helping learners develop professional identities and resist erosion of their status and autonomy. Generally, all will share a pedagogy that encourages dialogue and the experience of variation (polyphony).

One, more specific, suggestion will be made here, however. Various authors have examined *narratives* as a valuable means of raising consciousness and becoming aware of other experiences of variation. Linell (2009, 243) observes that the narrative is an intuitively useful way of organising information, giving experiences shape, form and order by embedding them within a "plot" and using the narrative to forge links between "the exceptional and the ordinary". In his definitive study of conspiracy theories, Knight (2000) observes that one reason these forms of counterknowledge are attractive is that they exploit the narrative form, as well as features of certain fictional genres, to construct a theory of how the world works into which evidence can be easily slotted, even when it may seem to challenge the conspiracy theory. Narratives (Linell 2009, 243–4):

> (D)eal with the unexpected, create a viable account or a good story by showing the deviance in relief to the normal order of things. A good story presupposes some 'normal' background setting, introduces certain complications, and then accounts for the resolution of the problems and the restoration of normality (it accounts for why the deviation from the norm occurred).... narratives are not just retrospective accounts of past events... they involve active attempts to shape the present and the future.

Within narratives, one can see signs of the information landscapes that have shaped them. For example, Wertsch (2002, cited in Linell 2009, 244) shows that both Russians and Americans presented narratives about their

countries' history in characteristic ways, emphasising emotion and the fight for freedom in the American case, the preservation of indigenous culture and the expulsion of foreign invaders in the Russian. At the very other end of the scale, personal construct psychology also encourages (amongst other things) the learner to explore and scrutinise personal narratives of change, and blockages to change: in their book on the subject, Fransella and Dalton also present case studies as narratives (e.g. 2000, 27–30). Purdue (2003) considers narrative a useful tool to use at the beginning of group professional development sessions, with participants offering stories and experiences, seeing parables as a kind of extant collective map of a landscape. Broidy (2007) did much the same to teach gender issues in information. Watkins and Russo (2005) took the technique outside the academy, undertaking work of this kind with communities in Queensland, Australia. Whitworth, Garnett and Pearson (2012; see also below) researched the links that could be built between informal learning communities and formal learning organisations in Manchester, UK. One technique used was when a city museum helped local communities present their narratives through helping them create 'Cabinets of Curiosities', video-based presentations of technological artifacts in which were encoded information that was relevant to communities or individuals, creating resources that were relevant to subsequent community learning. Popular culture offers narratives for analysis, and material to use in reflection: Ward (2006) suggests the use of images and music; Detmering (2010) uses films, specifically *Burn After Reading*, *Thank You For Smoking* and *W*. The present author adopts this approach in his teaching, using Morgan Spurlock's film *Supersize Me,* and the accompanying book (Spurlock 2005), as an illustration of various forms of information gathering and information concealment, with the film itself being an example of self-generated, justified research and conclusions[3] used to address a question of political and social interest (the effect of fast food on health) (Spurlock 2005). Herman (1998, cited in Luyt and Azura 2010) encourages students and teachers to use local and alternative media as resources for learning, as opposed to an increasingly concentrated corporate media, recognising that the stories, enquiries, and critiques present in these media will be more relevant within specific contexts.

Reflection can also be promoted by encouraging learners to develop their own narratives, either in an ad hoc way or systematically, perhaps through writing a journal or, more publicly, creating a blog. These are valuable tools in reflective practice (Loughran 2002) and also can become texts, through which narratives can be shared with colleagues and discussion ensue. They can also become data for analysis. Narayan (2012)

asked twenty people to record their interactions with information each day, using the data to study information behaviour in prosaic settings. Her method sought to overcome limitations which affected Kuhlthau's and other information retrieval studies (Saracevic 2007b): namely that the act of assigning research subjects an information task immediately constrains their activity and risks making the behaviour artificial or, at least, applicable only within the context from which the task emerged. Her subjects were not engaged in specific tasks, however: she sought to have them record *every* engagement they had with information over the study period. Narayan expressed concern in her thesis that even then, the journal could not be a wholly objective source of data about her subjects' information behaviour, because the act of keeping the journal may have changed their behaviour (the so-called "Hawthorne Effect"). However, this is precisely the effect being encouraged here. Narratives like these can be useful for information counselling, helping reveal personal constructs (cf. Kuhlthau 1993; Fransella and Dalton 2002). Describing and reflecting on events allows values and assumptions to be foregrounded, one can trace trains of thought and sources after the fact, and so on: this is the original intention of the term *journalism*, so one might call it 'personal journalism'. With the blog, this self-presentation can be made more public. Narratives like these draw attention to how the image of the author is constructed, and thus, the image of authority present in the narrative. This, in turn, allows the claims of the author to be reviewed, and judged as more or less relevant within the reader's chronotope and landscapes.

The criticism that encouraging this kind of self-presentation contributes to 'information overload' and the 'cult of the amateur' can be effaced if the material is published in an *information literate* way, e.g. by attending to metadata, accessibility, use of language: in short, making the information of good quality. The sort of assistance that is needed here, for the effective (micro-)production, retrieval, and use of this kind of information, may be drawn from libraries, teachers, and other professionals; it may also be drawn at times from fellow members of one's community and social network.

Ultimately what radical IL pedagogy seeks is to develop "informed participation" (Wilson 1983, 144) in the decision-making structures of society. This is an ideal, and, as Wilson admits (*ibid*, 145), not often attained in our less-than-ideal democratic society. Yet this is precisely the point: it is this low level of informed participation that radical IL seeks to address.

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