Introduction from the Editors of the

Special Issue

Darin Freeburg
University of South Carolina
R. David Lankes
University of South Carolina

Abstract: This special issue of the Journal of New Librarianship centers on the framing of a

Knowledge School. More than a branding tool, this is being used by the University of South Carolina

School of Library and Information Science as a way of coming to terms with what library and

information science as a field is and should be. This special issue is an invitation for other academics

and practitioners to join the conversation.

Keywords: *community, library and information science, knowledge school*

The lecture is a much-maligned form of instruction. To be more accurate we should say maligned and abused. Lectures have come to be associated with professors droning on for their own amusement witnessed by hundreds of undergraduate students shoved into lecture halls. Yet lecture, when done right, are an excellent form of beginning conversations. Lectures, when done right, are conversations. Not so much between the audience and the speaker, but within the audience themselves.

A good lecture introduces a topic is a broad and engaging way. It seeks to provide a basis for broader engagement and acts as an invitation to go further. A good lecture sparks questions within the participant. It should raise questions and challenge a listener to seek answers within their own experience.

This is the academic tradition that guides this special issue. This is an introduction and an invitation to conversation. It is not a textbook or a masterwork. It is, at the end of the day, a story of how one faculty at one institution struggled to come to terms with what library and information science as a field was today. It shows, warts and all, the struggles of scholars and staff and students to not only place themselves in a global context, but to shape that context with their work and values.

Unlike many stories we are used to today, this is the raw telling. It will include contradictions. It will include fuzzy definitions. It is not recast to make it seem like the answers and directions were obvious from the start. It is also a story still unfolding. However, this story is now unfolding at that school, and in libraries across the globe. And we invite you to join the story.

Key Definitions

In discussing the Knowledge School, USC faculty agreed on some working definitions for key terms. This intentional definition of key terms in disciplinary or professional areas is more than a mere

semantic game. It outlines what corporations strive for, and how social systems are treated. Anderson and Jamison (2015) noted the strikingly similar language used in values, vision, and mission statements across the 100 largest US corporations. In spite of this shared language, however, there is a lack of clarity on what this language means. A lack of clear definitions "leads to a wide variation of results based on the same values" (Anderson & Jamison, 2015, p. 10). Organizations need to outline their own unique definitions of these shared values to fuse together a shared goal that can be achieved, avoiding a multiplicity of goals based on personal definitions that cannot be achieved.

Definitions also fundamentally shape how society addresses its various population groups. Drum (2014) noted that definitions of disability create "a conceptual baseline for assessing the social experience of a more or less shared phenomenon." Although these definitions must be flexible and adaptable to account for shifting contexts, they set the tone for research, programs, and policies. With such a broad impact of definitions, it is easy to see the importance of such definitions in meeting the needs of several underserved population groups.

In schools of Library and Information Science—broadly categorized—several key terms are included in mission statements. These schools strive to "make information work," "create and share knowledge . . . to build a better world," and "gain insights from data to drive business strategies." Three words are shared across these schools that are fundamental to the discipline and profession: data, information, and knowledge. It's difficult to find anyone within the field of information science who does not have their own definitions of these key terms. And this is OK. Universal agreement across these schools is not necessary—nor desired. It's OK because those in this field—from user experience designers to librarians—have a job to do. There is an outcome they hope to achieve, and a series of decisions they need to make about how to get there. They don't stop to ensure that what is offered in a family information literacy event matches Buckland's' definition of information—they just do it. They

don't stop to ensure that the content organized on the web retains the objectivity in definitions of data—they just do it.

Yet, just as the shared language from corporations needs intentional definitions from each corporation, a Knowledge School that seeks to impact the world in particular ways benefits from being intentional about how it uses these terms. These definitions coalesce and galvanize its central mission to use its various tools to conduct research and prepare students to make a positive social impact. Not being restricted to universal definitions does not mean definitions are not important. The key distinction is that what a school's definition should be based on what helps it achieve its mission. And this can change often based on complex and shifting realities.

Conceptualizations influence action—whether this is done intentionally or not. Consider data. If data are defined as purely objective and raw stimuli, they can be taken at face value as a representation of what is truly happening. If data are defined as subjectively manipulated stimuli, there is an inherent level of skepticism that follows the use of this stimuli. This impacts how data is used in teaching and research. Neither is inherently better than the other. For those who want to speed up the processing of employment applications, data must represent some semblance of reality so the process can be automated. For those wanting to look deeper into the potential of applicants, these same data can be defined as subjective, requiring more individual scrutiny that cannot be automated. Each definition is based on practical organizational goals and priorities—not on philosophical or logical mandates. And they simultaneous influence action.

A parallel movement regarding definitions has been occurring in research methods. The shift toward mixed methods research came out of a realization that it does little good to restrain methods of inquiry to that which matches a pre-existing set of credos. No longer is it necessary that, if one is a Realist with an Objectivist epistemology, they must be a Quantitative researcher. No longer is it

necessary that, if one's research question is about how individuals construct meaning locally, they must choose methods only from the Qualitative handbook. This *incompatibility* thesis does not work in practice, and there are several inquiries that can furthered by both Qualitative and Quantitative methods. In a similar way, there are objectives that can be accomplished from a wide array data, information, and knowledge tools—each with a contextually originated definition.

The following is the definitions of these key terms for a Knowledge School. To the traditional list is added an addition term—knowing—that further drives its mission.

- Data—"Discrete, objective facts or observations, which are unorganized, and unprocessed, and do not convey any specific meaning" (Rowley, 2007).

- Information--The codified materials that come from the organization of data into meaningful patterns or the documentation of one's knowing.

- Knowledge—The result of internalization of information. Ingesting it into one's cognitive system, combining it with what they already know and have experienced. Not all of this knowledge is actually put into action, thus the need for knowing.

- Knowing—the behaviors associated with putting knowledge into action:

 "We use the term 'knowing' to refer to the epistemological dimension of action itself. By 'knowing' we do not mean something that is used in action or something necessary to action, but rather something that is a part of action (both individual and group action)" (Cook & Brown, 1999, p. 60).

What is a Knowledge School

So what is a Knowledge School? Here is a working definition:

The Knowledge School intentionally focuses its efforts on socially just, community-based, and practitioner-informed and influenced knowing.

Unpacking this a bit, we see that the addition of knowing is what galvanized the mission of the Knowledge School. It's not concerned only with information, but with what the information allows individuals to do. It's not concerned only with data, but with what the data allow us to do. It is not satisfied with knowledge and learning but continues to push toward action that results from this learning. Significant things happen when you focus on action rather than things and states of being.

Unpacking this further, knowing is carefully articulated within the Knowledge School. It is expressed within some important concrete boundaries—namely, the school's emphasis is on action that is socially just, community-emergent, and practitioner-informed.

Yet, perhaps the easiest way to outline the definition, uniqueness, and importance of the knowledge school is to identify what happens without it. That is, what happens when you take away the focus toward socially just, community based, and practitioner-informed and influenced knowing?

- You get standards for information literacy that come from places of privilege and discount local modes of inquiry.

- You get data without ethics. The possibilities of data are infinite—sometimes infinitely unjust. The knowledge school's focus limits these possibilities in an equitable way.

- You get ideas not informed by practice. The knowledge school is engaged in a constant conversation with practitioners, where ideas and practices are shared and prototyped in both directions.

- You get informatics without the social. Several outlets can wax poetic on technology and its capabilities without a solid understanding of its social development.

- You get research agendas driven by funding rather than social need.

The authors included in this issue are not the only ones doing this. The faculty and staff of the University of South Carolina are not the only ones doing this. We did not set out to mark ourselves apart with this special issue, as the hallowed ground of justice and relevancy to which all others must pay homage. Rather, we are saying that this approach—even though it exists elsewhere—is still unique. It is not the norm. Considerations of social justice, though laudable when exercised, are far from ubiquitous. Research that partners with communities—though an entire research paradigm in and of itself, noted in community-based participatory research—is far from pervasive. Research and teaching that includes practitioners and future practitioners in conversations about best approaches—though the gold standard in many disciplines—can be too easily disregarded.

We come alongside those who were already engaged in these practices before we came along and gave it a name. But we hope that the name gives it momentum such that it does become the norm.

The articles in this issue provide specific examples of what happens when a Knowledge School is enacted. This is not exhaustive; rather, it is the intentional continuation of a vital conversation about what LIS programs do. It is a conversation that we hope the reader will engage in as LIS programs around the world find their places within complex environments. These are places of facilitation and advocacy, rather than places of control and regulation. These are environments with information needs and needs that cannot be addressed by what already exists. When faculty and staff were asked to consider their own teaching, research, and service in light of this mission—*The Knowledge School intentionally focuses its efforts on socially just, community-based, and practitioner-informed and influenced knowing*—this is what they came up with:

- It is about partnerships and collaboration. It is a school of thought *and* conversation.
- It is about understanding communities rather than teaching them.

- It is about a contextual approach to community needs that recognizes the need for flexible approaches to empower people to make the best decisions for themselves and their communities. It has a social mission.

- It is about a faculty and staff that models the ethical and socially just behavior they hope to inspire in their students and giving these students opportunities to practice this behavior.

- It is about extracting the unique knowledge of community members to discover innovative solutions to problems.

- It is about experimentation and getting your hands dirty, not waiting in a closed room until the perfect idea is discovered. It's about risk and failure. It embraces complexity and the unknown.

- It is about questions rather than answers. It is about curiosity. It is about skepticism.

- It is about librarianship. School libraries play a foundational role, and all librarians are facilitators in knowledge creation.

As they read these articles, readers are invited to join in the discussion and advance the narrative.

How to Read this Issue

This issue provides various thoughts and opinions about what a Knowledge School is, what it means, and what it does. The various articles highlight elements of such a school of thought, providing—rather than a comprehensive structure—concrete examples of the research and teaching done in the Knowledge School. They in no way represent definitive answers and are not intended to be read as the *textbook* for the Knowledge School.

The articles included in this special issue cover different levels of specificity and cover some of the ways in which the idea was approached by faculty and staff at USC. What started as an idea for a

school of thought and signature of a specific academic unit (The University of South Carolina's School

of Library and Information Science) morphed in several ways, expanded by the particular passions of

faculty and staff to now a larger school of thought with global participation of academics, libraries,

funding agencies, and individuals. The articles of this issue attempt to capture important elements of

this extension.

This special issue covers various levels of impact for the Knowledge School. The first level is the

Knowledge School within an historical context, providing the views of faculty on where it fits within the

larger historical trajectory of librarianship and Library and Information Science education. David

Lankes talks about three major intellectual foundations in librarianship: from the industrial age, from

the information age, and he argues now in the knowledge age. His argument is that each of these eras

shaped often invisible worldviews that ultimately limited what librarianship could do and be for

communities. Jennifer Arns outlines a brief history of librarianship, noting its adaptability. Beginning

as a place for the scholar, it moved outward to be of value to rural farmers. It adapted to changing

population landscapes, seeking to be of value to immigrants and—over time—African American

Communities. It realized the promises, economic potential, and problems of new technologies,

realizing the need to be part of this discussion. The Knowledge School is part of this context, utilizing

theory and knowledge to create public value. The value is multidimensional, and the Knowledge

School is not an answer. Instead, it continues the search for how best to provide such value in new

contexts.

The second level is the Knowledge School within the specific context of The University of South

Carolina and higher education. Charles Curran and Heather Braum write about the process of

becoming a Knowledge School, quickly noting the tie-ins with the history of the school at the

University of South Carolina. Elise Lewis writes about the process of transforming abstract definitions

into a logical curriculum that both makes sense to students and helps them succeed. Travis Wagner and Sarah Keeling focus on the students within a Knowledge School, outlining the ideal priorities of those who graduate from such a school.

The third level is the Knowledge School within the context of librarianship. Although it has become a more universal school of thought in many ways, librarians are its initial audience. Librarians will be the ones to implement, replicate, and expand the ideas presented in these articles as they continue to fill gaps and unmet needs. David Lankes leads discusses the roles of librarians, specifically reference librarians. He calls for them to be a proactive missionary force going into the community. Heather Moorefield-Lang and Megan Coker write about the importance of maker-spaces as places for innovation and creativity. Clayton Copeland writes that access to information is still important and must not be overlooked by libraries in the quest for knowledge and knowing.

The fourth level is the Knowledge School within the context of specific communities. Vanessa Kitzie outlines the need for a more nuanced approach to information literacy that moves beyond assumptions that legitimated experts have what the assumed illiterate need. In her study of LGBTQ+ individuals, she discovered the variety of information needed to negotiate between authenticity—what someone ought to do—and realness—a more varied expression of identity. Feili Tu-Keefner highlights the role of Knowledge School educators and students in community initiatives and research during times of crises. She notes the importance of partnerships among librarians, faculty, students, and other community partners in providing relevant and critical information.

The final level is the Knowledge School within the context of a broader social mission that reaches into every organization and social system. Darin Freeburg outlines a human-centered approach to issues of information and knowledge, one directed at the ultimate goal of action that is well-informed. Jason Alston posits that curiosity is essential to extracting any promised value out of

information. Information on its own is insufficient without a willing and curious audience: "Information

must be met with a desire to believe it."

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