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Constructing the Literate Child in the Library: An Analysis of School Library Standards

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Abstract

I examine one set of elementary school library standards (New York City School Library System, n.d.) in an effort to analyze the impact that the standards might have on literacy experiences for young children in one urban school setting. Employing a critical discourse analysis framework, I examine the language that the Empire State Information Fluency Continuum uses to privilege certain kinds of knowledge construction. Focusing on the descriptions of knowledge, inquiry, and informational literacy constructed by the standards, I argue that the Information Fluency Continuum perpetuates notions of literacy and inquiry that are linear and hierarchical. I argue that educator conceptions of inquiry, engagements with texts, and social responsibility practices must be widened. Rather than expecting students to follow a sequential set of steps, libraries might be a space where students are given agency to decide when and how they would engage in literacy and pursue inquiries.

Keywords: literacy, school libraries, standards, inquiry, informational text

Literature abounds about the current accountability culture permeating the field of education. Many scholars have deemed the current era (the mid-1990s to the present) a "standards era," where standards, curricular reforms, and assessments exert powerful influences on educators and students (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Dutro, 2010; Olivant, 2015). More specifically, these policy initiatives and their subsequent implementation shape educational practices. As a result of a new emphasis on standards and assessments, many schools across the country are experiencing the narrowing of literacy curricula, particularly in urban school systems with high concentrations of poverty (MacGillivray, Lassiter Ardell, Curwen, & Palma, 2004), such as New York City (NYC) public schools (Lapham, 2013). Because of this curricular narrowing, much attention has already been paid to examining and critiquing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as a significant artifact in the standards-era debate (Olivant, 2015). Whereas recent attention has focused on the CCSS, the standards-based reform movement has been around much longer, brought on in large part by the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* (LaVenia, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). Since the mid-1990s, standards have been a central part of debates around school reform.

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To counteract the narrowing of literacy curricula and experiences, library scholars have argued that school libraries can offer an opportunity for students to interact with texts in flexible and collaborative ways (Mueller, 2015). Just as the CCSS have been analyzed as an artifact exerting significant influence upon students' learning in classrooms, I position school library standards as playing a significant role in shaping literacy in the library. School libraries have—throughout their distinct history—been positioned differently and complimentarily to classrooms as more democratic sites or "public forums for learning" (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. 1). Subsequently, they have not been as tied to the increasing emphasis on standards, assessments, and accountability that classrooms have. School library standards, therefore, have had the flexibility to be "guideposts, not straightjackets" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 213), as many scholars have contended that standards for student learning indeed should be used as informative guides, not as the basis for punitive measures. School library standards are not implemented with the same degree of accountability as the CCSS, yet they have nonetheless helped determine the role of digital literacies, informational literacies, and notions of inquiry that students may or may not encounter throughout their schooling (Ellis & Lenk, 2001). Although the library standards are a textual document and might be viewed or utilized in isolation, I argue that the text of the standards cannot be analyzed outside the context in which the standards have been written, revised, and enacted. In other words, the iterations of library standards are reflective of national priorities, ideologies, and events. For this reason, they merit inclusion and analysis in discussions of school libraries, literacy instruction, and education more broadly.

In this article, I examine one set of elementary school library standards (New York City School Library System, n.d.) in an effort to describe and analyze the impact that the standards might have on young children's literacy experiences in one urban school setting. Although I examine school library standards for one public school system, I situate this analysis within the broader literature on the history of learning standards, school libraries, and shifting notions of literacy education. Additionally, although I focus on specific local standards, I acknowledge that school librarians also operate in a professional context that takes into account national school library standards, ideologies, and professional commitments. This article uses a sociocultural literacy framework to situate literacy socially, rather than as sets of autonomous skills that develop in a linear trajectory (Street, 2005). Specifically, I ask: How might the *Empire State Information Fluency Continuum* (IFC) for school libraries privilege certain ways of being "literate" in the school library? To answer this question, I employ critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Gee, 2005) methodology and seek to identify how the language of the standards depicts learning and inquiry in ways that privilege particular ways of being literate in the library. In doing so, images of ideal readers are constructed as those who make personal connections to texts, perform reading in ways deemed appropriate, and conduct their inquiries in a prescribed manner. Finally, I suggest further research into school library standards and discuss the implications that library standards have for young children's literacy learning.

Why the Library?

Learning—in particular, literacy—gets taken up in many places, the library being one of them. As Dressman (1997) contends, however, researchers of literacy education have traditionally focused on classroom (e.g., Dyson, 2003) and community literacies (e.g., Bloome & Enciso, 2006), with much less attention to school libraries as sites for literacy research. Given the constraints imposed by compliance practices related to literacy standards, assessments, and curricula in many urban classrooms (Dutro, 2010; MacGillivray et al., 2004), school libraries have experienced a resurgence in attention and popularity, as it is argued that libraries can offer a more flexible and inquiry-driven literacy experience than the traditional classroom (Mueller, 2015). In fact, Duke, Martin, and Akers (2013) argue that the school librarian has the potential to foster long-term relationships with students and recommend that the school library be considered an important place for both literacy learning and research. School libraries traditionally have their own set of informational literacy standards. Whereas library standards may not drive the curriculum quite like the CCSS (Olivant, 2015), library standards nonetheless play a significant role in the literacy experiences that students have outside—and sometimes inside—the classroom. Due to this impact, I argue for the need to unpack the language of the standards. Standards for school libraries can serve as an artifact, illustrating the competing shifts, priorities, and ideologies that have shaped school libraries throughout their history. In this piece, I situate my analysis of one set of local library standards within the context of literacy education at large. I analyze the IFC (New York City School Library System, n.d.) for school libraries and seek to uncover the ways in which the language of the standards constructs particular notions of knowledge, literacy, and the "successful student."

Background of School Library Standards

Before the early 20th century, many schools had libraries, but they were not organized in the way that students currently know them. In fact, libraries in the late 1800s often consisted of large quantities of books delivered to schools through book wagons, acting more as resource hubs than spaces for students to read for pleasure and information (Michie & Holton, 2005). Over time, many other materials were incorporated into the library model, including audiovisual equipment to better view and access library materials. With the expansion of materials came an expansion of the library's purpose. Libraries became spaces that were open to children to pursue their own interests and inquiries in books (Brown, 2012). However, the rise of resources, such as the *School Library Journal,* which provided book reviews and news coverage relevant to school libraries—coupled with increased curricular expectations—equally influenced text selection in libraries. The Committee on Library Organization and Equipment within the National Education Association's Department of Secondary Education produced a report with the first set of school library standards, which the American Library Association then adopted into standards for secondary school libraries in 1918 (Michie & Holton, 2005). Shortly thereafter, in 1925, the American Library Association and the National Education Association prepared elementary school library standards that were optional, yet served as a cornerstone for individual states to develop their own local library standards (Michie & Holton, 2005). These standards, outlined in the 1925 *School Library*

Yearbook, deemed the school library a laboratory for students to access information and express themselves (Midland, 2008). Ultimately, these early goals for libraries and librarians focused on fostering independence, curiosity, and positive attitudes toward lifelong learning. Still positioned as centers of literacy resources and information, libraries also became spaces that were designed for students to pursue their own inquiries and interests with guidance from a school librarian.

Libraries began to garner increased attention in the 1950s, when "funding for school libraries first [became] available through the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958" (Michie & Holton, 2005, p. 2). After Sputnik launched, leaders in business, government, and school administration became concerned about the state of education and called for reforms. The NDEA signaled a shift in national priority and provided an opportunity to reconsider the role that the library might play in educating young children. Instead of continuing to be flexible hubs for student exploration, libraries became spaces where students might acquire and refine independent research skills. As a result, library standards began to attract attention from educational policymakers in the late 1950s as one way to influence literacy instruction in schools, when the state of American education became the center of widespread debate.

In 1960, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) prepared a new set of standards, *The Standards for School Library Programs*, to address and reflect the changes in the library as a space for learning. Incorporating new media, such as audiovisual materials, became a focal point, illustrating the need for libraries to evolve with technological advances, as well as to support shifting notions of literacy across schools. By 1969, an emphasis on media dominated the school library discourse— particularly regarding the rights of students to express themselves through media—and the Standards for School Media Programs were created (Midland, 2008). The year 1975 led to yet another revision in the standards, led by the AASL and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, entitled *Media Programs: District and School*; these standards guided school libraries to incorporate the new expectations for strategic technology integration in education (Michie & Holton, 2005). Each new iteration of standards reflected rapid changes in digital technology (Kalmbach, 1996) and schoolwide needs to educate students on how to effectively utilize digital texts. New national standards (i.e., AASL's *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*) again entered the library space in 1988 and were updated in 1998 (Michie & Holton, 2005). In the latter part of the 20th century, using information became the focal point in school library discussions, and assisting students to become independent researchers was the ultimate goal of library education. The most recent iteration of these national standards, AASL's *Standards for* the *21st-Century Learner* (2007) and *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs (*2009) positioned libraries as central spaces for students to experiment with new literacies and media (Johns, 2008), providing a foundation for the subsequent development of the *Information Fluency Continuum* (IFC). These more recent AASL standards followed calls (e.g., Ellis & Lenk, 2001) for school media specialists to integrate technology with curriculum by arguing that these connections were made most naturally in library programs and then applied in students' general literacy instruction.

Although school libraries may have originally been conceived of as resource hubs for materials, their roles have evolved as a result of larger shifts in education. School libraries now serve as spaces of student inquiry and have been influenced by increasing accountability measures. These shifts are not only significant, as they reflect larger changes in public education and the social context, but entail changing—and often competing—national and local priorities.

Problem Statement

Situated within the larger fields of library science and literacy studies, I selected one set of school library standards used in NYC public elementary schools for analysis. According to the introduction to the IFC (New York City School Library System, n.d.), the library is a "public forum" (p. 1) for students to engage with literacy, with the goal of encouraging students to be independent readers, writers, and researchers. Despite positioning the school library as a public forum, however, the content of these standards furthers a notion of literacy as something that can be obtained and that develops linearly. This notion of literacy as obtainable is perhaps seen most clearly in language such as "The information-literate student in Grade One has developed the following skills" (p. 30). Discourse around "the information-literate student" constructs a binary between students who are literate (i.e., have mastered the appropriate skills at the appropriate benchmarks) and students who are illiterate (i.e., have not mastered the appropriate skills at the appropriate benchmarks). This binary is problematic, contradicting the notion that the school library is a place for youth to share and develop their own voices and literate identities (Kumasi & Hughes-Hassell, 2017). Positioning literacy as a set of "autonomous" skills (Street, 2005, p. 417) assumes that literacy is neutral rather than a socioculturally situated practice. Reducing literacy to such skills—and dismissing the contexts in which these practices develop—often excludes groups of students who are historically marginalized in classroom settings due to their racial, cultural, and/or linguistic markers (Kumasi & Hughes-Hassell, 2017). When seemingly neutral or objective skillsets are privileged in schools, for example, students who bring their own culturally situated literacy practices may find themselves marked as less proficient than their peers whose literacies align with dominant practices. Although discussions of literacy as something to be acquired or obtained are common in other instructional areas, there is a tension between this standards-based language and the space of the library, as it has been argued that the library should maintain its democratic ideals and curricular fluidity (Dressman, 1997).

In constructing binaries between who is literate and who is not—often at the expense of historically underserved students—the IFC furthers dominant perceptions of behaviors that literate children engage in. For example, components of Standard 2—"reads by his or her own choice" (p. 34) and "discusses favorite books and authors" (p. 37)—construct the literate child as one who reads for pleasure. This construction reproduces a particular way of being a reader—an image that privileges self-selected reading and disregards other factors that may influence a student's orientation as a reader, such as multilingualism, academic ability, and the opportunity to select texts that portray diversity and other lived experiences that have been historically marginalized (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). For example, if a library lacks a diverse or multicultural selection of picture books,

marginalized students may not see themselves reflected in texts and may not have the desire to read for pleasure. Marking these children as not yet literate oversimplifies the many complex factors that comprise one's identity as a literacy learner. Although the IFC is situated in a historical and political context, I argue that the text itself is a powerful artifact within the school library system that, in many ways, guides the focus of instruction. Consistent with the framework that Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2006) illustrate in their work, I seek to uncover the images of learning that are furthered through library standards in the IFC.

Theoretical Framework: Sociocultural Perspective on Literacy

Libraries have, throughout their history, been conceptualized in relation to the larger school institution as spaces designed to support the formal literacy instruction of the school. Drawing on sociocultural literacy studies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 2005), I look to the standards themselves as a textual artifact, which in part set the priorities for literacy instruction in the library. I employ a CDA methodology (Gee, 2005) in order to understand how the library standards take up the language of choice and inquiry, and subsequently, how students may be included or excluded from these conceptions.

This analysis draws from sociocultural literacies within the larger framework of new literacy studies. Sociocultural perspectives on literacy broaden what counts as literacy and views individuals as complex cultural beings. As Giampapa (2010) argued, "education is the nexus of social, political, and ideological discourses about what counts as valuable linguistic and cultural knowledge, and who has access to these legitimate forms of capital, and the identity positions assigned to them" (p. 409). Dominant discourses in education serve to include or exclude students who may or may not fit with the discourses at work in educational spaces (i.e., library spaces). From this perspective, I question the notion of standards and benchmarks around literacy-based inquiry skills that privilege traditional texts and processes of engaging in informational literacy.

Sociocultural perspectives on literacy have also problematized the idea that literacy is a discrete set of skills that develops in a linear trajectory (Street, 2005), and have instead reframed literacy as situated within social and cultural frameworks. Dyson (2008) argued that any official literacy "event" is situated within a cultural practice, steeped in ideology and values. This view of literacy makes it impossible to reduce literacy to sets of skills because it holds that all literacy practices are socially and culturally situated. These literacy events are complex, as they are mediated by students, texts, and the library standards. Therefore, taking a sociocultural perspective on literacy complicates the linear image of learning that is put forth by the IFC.

As a theory and methodology, CDA fits with a sociocultural framework, as it seeks to uncover different narrative styles and discourse strategies in particular social contexts. As Michaels (1981) discussed, documenting discourse shifts in classroom interactions can illuminate some of the ways in which mismatches in understanding and practice occur. To demonstrate how written texts also take up discourses, Rodriguez (1997) examined the ambiguity of the National Science Education Standards and argued that the standards take up a discourse of invisibility and thereby miss opportunities to promote equity and inclusion. Using discourse analysis to analyze ethnographic data, Rogers (2003) located

power within everyday interactions in her analysis of the tensions between her participants' rich literacy lives and the discourses of formal schooling.

In taking a sociocultural perspective to literacy and language, I must acknowledge and examine how my own subjectivities impact my examination of school library standards (Peshkin, 1988). As a young student, I identified as a reader and found my school library inviting, exciting, and accessible. The libraries of my childhood were largely unregulated spaces where I could interact with texts on my own terms. I bring these lived experiences with me to this work and they are inherently embedded in my data analysis and interpretation (Peshkin, 1988). My own experiences in libraries have led me to regard them as spaces imbued with inquiry and choice, and I therefore tend to frame school libraries in this manner throughout my work.

Literature Review: A Deeper Look into School Library Standards

This analysis builds on a robust body of literature within library science, as well as theoretical frameworks from literacy studies. Within the field of library science, the study of librarianship has typically framed professional identity within descriptions of tasks, roles, and status (Johnston, 2012; Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2000), which differs from a sociocultural literacy framework. Integrating a sociocultural framework into library sciences therefore evokes dissonance. Library standards—situated within library science—have been the topic of some research studies (Lance & Kachel, 2013; Mardis & Dickinson, 2009), although this is still an under-researched area.

Although school libraries do have their own standards, those standards operate in relation to the CCSS. In fact, Todd (2012) examined the impact of the CCSS on library programs, particularly as they concern the visibility and future sustainability of library programs. He argued that "the heart of the Common Core Standards is the information-to-knowledge journey of students" (p. 9), with the core work of the school librarian being to support this journey. As Todd argued, school librarians are teachers first; a library is "where disciplines meet" (p. 12). This perspective positions the library as a pedagogical center of a school, arguing that the CCSS must be visible in library instruction. Todd argued that school librarians must unpack and critically examine those standards, although in this conceptual paper he did not analyze the standards themselves. Therefore, whereas integration of the CCSS in the library setting is a productive endeavor, the responsibility of critical analysis is left to librarians.

The Perception of School Library Standards

Many scholars who do attend explicitly to school library standards analyzed how the standards are perceived and implemented by schools. Although the studies in this section did not explore analyses of the written text itself, they demonstrated how perceptions of standards matter to their ultimate success. Mardis and Dickinson (2009), for example, sought to understand how preservice school library media specialists came to perceive the Standards for the 21st-Century Learner, which "[were] the culmination of almost a year of work scanning trends in information-rich learning, technology in schools, and children's changing ways of interacting with the world" (p. 2). Mardis and Dickinson argued that the field of librarianship has always been standards-driven, but unlike curricular standards, has depended on buy-in from a variety of stakeholders due to the

wide range of people invested and interested in school libraries. Therefore, how library educators understand and react to the library standards is essential to their eventual implementation.

To present their findings, Mardis and Dickinson (2009) went through each of the standards, emphasizing how preservice school library media specialists perceived each standard. They found that their participants liked the language of the first standard about thinking critically and, the authors argued that "participants favored the structure of the new standards as being important to easy integration with existing state and local standards frameworks" (p. 14). The authors found that participants felt there were fewer barriers with these new standards and that they could be more seamlessly integrated with curriculum. Although understanding how and why standards are implemented in the library is important, Mardis and Dickinson analyzed perceptions of standards in implementation and not the language of the standards or the actual implementation of the standards. As Dutro (2010) argues, instructional materials themselves are significant to study, as these materials have direct impact on the learning experiences that students have in school. Similarly, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2006) demonstrated that it is important to study the language of artifacts in their critique of the No Child Left Behind language that directly influenced teachers and teaching. In line with these findings, I argue that school library standards impact the opportunities for students to be perceived as literate in the library.

Because standards are designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful, other bodies of research have explored school library standards in the context of student learning. In Pennsylvania, Lance and Kachel (2013) explored the connections or disconnections between school library standards and student achievement in efforts to better understand the ways in which schools view the standards as a possible influence on student achievement. They conducted a survey of administrators, probing their beliefs about key library practices, and the extent to which administrators found these key practices successful. Lance and Kachel focused on the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association and presented two significant findings from their study. First, when administrators expressed that collaboration between librarians and teachers was essential, they were also more likely to rate their librarians as excellent. Second, administrators rated the first standard—inquiry-based learning—as more essential than every other standard. These results point to the focus on inquiry in library programs and are consistent with other findings (Bush, 2009; Jones & Dotson, 2010; Lance & Kachel, 2013). The authors claimed that when school administrators believe in the value of library practices such as inquiry, they were more likely to view the library programs as meeting and exceeding standards (Lance & Kachel, 2013). Whereas Lance and Kachel also presented a perception study, they analyzed library practices in conjunction with the standards, contextualizing the written text of the standards with implementation. The study's focus on inquiry and the librarian's role in promoting inquiry resonates with my purposes here.

Implementing Standards or Guidelines in Specific Environments

Drawing also from the AASL's Standards for the 21st-Century Learner—and with an eye toward implementation of those standards—Maniotes and Kuhlthau (2014) presented

an instructional framework, guided inquiry design, in an effort to move beyond what they termed "traditional research assignments" (p. 9) to more robust, authentic inquiry processes. As they stated, "AASL standards call for an inquiry approach to learning in K–12 schools, and CCSS requires research for all ages throughout the curriculum" (p. 14). Although they did not specifically examine the *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*, the authors unpacked the inquiry process, outlining concrete yet flexible instructional practices that could be implemented by school librarians. In doing so, they positioned the inquiry and learning process as complex and constructive, aligning with broader sociocultural theories of learning. Outlining the process of guided inquiry design as it relates to the standards, Maniotes and Kuhlthau advocated for an inquiry approach that positions school librarians as leaders in the inquiry process and in putting the AASL standards into practice. Building on and explicitly advocating for the implementation of the guided inquiry design framework, Levitov and Kaaland (2017) argued that fostering an inquiry-based learning environment in school libraries is at the heart of the *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* and critical to the function of school libraries.

Expanding on traditional notions of informational literacy, Neuman, Grant, Lee, and DeCarlo (2015) drew on the I-LEARN model developed previously by Neuman (2011), described as "a learning model that builds on and expands traditional information-seeking models specifically to address the processes and outcomes of learning with information" (p. 39). Neuman et al. put the I-LEARN model into practice with students who lived in a neighborhood of extreme poverty, where the study's authors focused on improving the digital and information literacies of young students. Like Maniotes and Kuhlthau (2014), these scholars focused on implementation of the standards, rather than the standards themselves. Neuman et al. (2015) positioned their work within broader conceptions of literacy and what being literate means, advocating for a "project-based, inquiry approach to learning with information" (p. 49). With a social-justice-oriented approach, the study found that the sequence and process of the I-LEARN framework was an effective way to support students in meeting informational literacy standards, although they did contend that implementation of the model—and the standards on which it was based—mattered. Simply following the steps outlined in the framework itself was not a solution without also examining the ways in which the steps were put into practice.

Developing Collections that Reflect Evolving Notions of Literacy

Because libraries serve a wide variety of students, interests, and stakeholders, evolving conceptions of literacy have shifted priorities in the library space. Multimodality and access to diverse forms of texts—such as graphic novels—continue to be at the forefront of discussions around what a 21st century education looks like. According to Gann (2013), the role of the librarian is to curate a diverse and quality set of materials for students, including an effort to promote "alternative reading materials" (e.g., graphic novels). In fact, Gann argued that *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* and *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* provided clear justification for including graphic novels in school library collections.

As evidenced by the many significant shifts in school library standards over time, it is clear that the library is reflective of educational policy shifts and evolving notions of literacy. As Levitov (2016) contended, inquiry has been a focus of school library

programs for some time. Echoing the sentiments of Maniotes and Kuhlthau (2014), Levitov (2016) positioned school librarians as champions of inquiry-based teaching, but also argued for clarification of inquiry processes across library programs and expansion into other school settings. Clarifying what inquiry meant across school library programs required a deep, critical analysis of the standards as a primary document. In fact, library spaces in general are still largely under-researched areas (Nitecki, 2011), with critical analyses of library standards receiving even less attention. Specifically, with the increased focus on student inquiry in library programs, many library scholars have examined effective ways to implement the inquiry-based standards, often overlooking a critical examination of the language of the standards. Whereas the standards have undergone countless revisions and updates, there is not enough research that takes up critical perspectives when analyzing the standards.

Lewis (2000) has asserted that, in schools, the social and political dimensions of texts are often ignored. Although her argument is primarily focused on literature, this notion can also be applied to informational text and inquiry-based research. Extending Lewis's argument, the whole concept of inquiry—and the processes through which it is taught— could be seen as political. As previously mentioned, it is essential that school librarians approach the complexity of the inquiry process with a critical stance. Kumasi-Johnson (2007) advocated for school librarians to be change agents who encourage students to investigate their real-life concerns. This, of course, requires a wider definition of what counts as literacy. As Janks (2010) contends, every text is merely one set of perspectives. If not approached critically, the recognition that texts, inquiry, and the process of research are highly political and contentious has the potential to be lost within inquiry goals, such as "accuracy," "currency," "relevancy," and "bias" (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. 6).

Therefore, whereas the studies above provide valuable contextual background regarding the debates around library standards, they only offered surface-level examinations of the actual content of the standards. Accounts of administrative perceptions, standards implementation, and inquiry frameworks are surely critical to the success of library programs, but are not sufficient. Although content can never be studied divorced from its context, there is already empirical research that attends to discussions, perceptions, and the implementation of standards. On the other hand, little work has been done around the language of the standards themselves. I argue that a detailed examination of the standards—in their written form—is also essential to this conversation. According to Standards 1, 2, and 3 in the IFC, what counts as literacy, and what does not?

Data Collection and Analysis Methodology

To examine the language of the standards and their underlying assumptions, I selected Gee's (2005) method of discourse analysis. As Gee states, discourse analysis "is a reciprocal and cyclical process in which we shuttle back and forth between the structure (form, design) of a piece of language and the situated meanings it is attempting to build around the world, identities, and relationships" (p. 118). To engage in discourse analysis, I attended specifically to issues of inquiry, knowledge, and learning (Gee, 2005). Although I focused my analysis on the three individual standards that make up the IFC and corresponding indicators, I considered those standards as a larger part of the

historical context of library standards, as well as learning standards in general. Therefore, the discourse analysis of the text examined the written content, the structure of the language, and the ideological underpinnings of the text (Dutro, 2010)—the larger notions of literacy, learning, and knowledge.

To analyze the document's discourse, I employed Gee's (2005) "building tasks" (p. 10). In particular, I focused on his *sign systems and knowledge* task, which asks us to consider the following question: How does this piece of language/text privilege or disprivilege certain ways of coming to know something? While I acknowledge that each of Gee's building tasks are connected and constitute an interrelated network, I selected the sign systems and knowledge task from his building tasks of language because it specifically seeks to illuminate how certain forms of knowledge are privileged in specific situations, which aligns most closely with my research question. To employ the sign systems and knowledge task, I sought to identify the ways in which literacy knowledge—and which conceptions of literacy knowledge—were privileged in the IFC.

Repetition of language over time, Gee (2005) argues, is one way to determine which concepts are privileged. Therefore, examining repetition of various words and phrases that were found through the discourse analysis of the standards, such as *inquiry, make connections, find answers,* and *respect* (New York City School Library System, n.d.), can assist readers in understanding how the standards might produce and reproduce rituals, as the discourse of the standards exerts direct influence over the instruction that occurs in the library. The analysis illuminated the use of the terms *inquiry* (Standard 1), *make connections* (Standard 2), *find answers* (Standard 1), and *respect* (Standard 3) (see Table 1).

The IFC standards are organized by indicators and are therefore already conveyed in small chunks of text for simple organization. Excerpts from each standard are highlighted by line in the section that follows, with expanded full-text language appearing in Table 1. Within each line, I underlined the findings of my analysis, drawing from the relevant repetition of words and phrases. Gee's (2005) sign systems and knowledge task allowed me to examine the language of the standards in order to uncover the ways in which certain ways of being literate—and ways of becoming literate—are privileged over others.

Table 1
Language of the Empire State Information Fluency Continuum

Standard	Language
Introduction to the IFC	"Inquiry is a fundamental building block of teaching and learning that empowers students to follow their sense of wonder into new discoveries and insights about the way the world works. The empowered learner calls upon information/inquiry skills to connect with what he or she knows, ask intriguing questions about what is not known, investigate the answers, construct new understandings, and communicate to share those understandings with others" (Introduction to the Information Fluency Continuum, Benchmark Skills, Assessments).

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"Our young people must go beyond being able to decode information to being able to use appropriate information in any situation; they must be 'information fluent' in order to thrive both in and out of school. In addition, like literacy, information fluency must extend in a coherent development continuum throughout the years of schooling, K–12 and beyond" (p. 1).

Standard 1: Using Inquiry to Build Understanding and Create New Knowledge	1. Plans research and <u>follows a timeline</u> (p. 16).
	2. "<u>Follows</u> a <u>modeled inquiry process</u> during each visit to the library to do research" (p. 16).
	3. "Locates nonfiction materials at appropriate reading levels with assistance" (p. 17).
	4. "Uses materials provided to <u>find answers</u> to questions posed" (p. 21).
	5. "Recognizes <u>facts</u>" (p. 21).
Standard 2: Pursuing Personal and Aesthetic Growth	6. "An independent learner responds to and creates literary and artistic expressions, uses effective strategies for personal exploration of ideas, and reads on his or her own by choice" (p. 34).
	7. "Uses prior knowledge to <u>connect</u> to and form <u>personal meaning</u> from fiction, nonfiction and multimedia works" (p. 35).
	8. "<u>Makes connections</u> between literature and own experiences" (p. 35).
	9. "<u>Creates personal meaning</u> from stories and performances" (p. 35).
	10. "Selects picture, fiction, and information books on a regular basis; tries some books in other genres (poetry, fairy tales)" (p. 36).
	11. "<u>Discusses favorite books</u> and authors" (p. 37).
Standard 3: Demonstrating Social Responsibility	12. "Begins to associate use of the library with <u>respect for rules and procedures</u>" (p. 44).
	13. "Respects the ideas of others by <u>listening</u> and <u>raising hands</u> before speaking" (p. 45).
	14. "Recognizes the right to express own opinion in an <u>appropriate manner</u>" (p. 44).
	15. "Practices giving positive feedback and <u>compliments as modeled by librarian</u>" (p. 45).
K–12 Priority Benchmark Skills	"The information-literate student in Grade 1 has developed the following skills" (IFC, Empire State Information Fluency Continuum K-12 Priority Benchmark Skills, Introduction, Grade 1).

Note. All underlining added for emphasis.

Findings and Discussion

The IFC used by NYC public schools (New York City School Library System, n.d.) is designed to be a guide for school librarians and is intended to support a library program that provides opportunities for students to establish and practice inquiry skills, engage in digital literacies, and construct projects of their own interest. It also calls for significant collaboration between librarians and teachers in working across content areas to assist students in meeting the outlined standards. Developed by the New York City School Library System, and endorsed by the School Library System Association of New York State, the IFC is a comprehensive document. The continuum reflects current literacy practices with an emphasis on the pursuit of inquiry within texts, informational literacies, and social responsibilities in an increasingly digital age to complement and extend the expectations of the CCSS. As such, the IFC contains standards, frameworks, and key indicators used to gauge whether these concepts and skills have been met (including a rubric outlining specific grade-level criteria). For this particular analysis, I attended to the overall introduction to the continuum, as well as the three standards, which are as follows: (1) "Using Inquiry to Build Understanding and Create New Knowledge," (2) "Pursuing Personal and Aesthetic Growth," and (3) "Demonstrating Social Responsibility" (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. 1). In addition to the three standards, the full document includes benchmark skills, rubrics, and aligned assessments that are intended to target each standard, and information on how the standards connect to the CCSS. Because of the comprehensive nature of the document, I selected the language of the three standards themselves and the subsequent indicators for each standard that referenced engaging in the inquiry process, accessing prior knowledge to connect to new texts, selecting sources of information to answer questions, and expressing ideas respectfully. These indicators most closely aligned with notions of inquiry and choice, and the language around constructing information-literate students, as discussed in the problem statement. As Dutro (2010) explained in her analysis of curricular materials, artifacts such as this must be examined for the ways in which the perception and implementation of the artifact may open or hinder opportunities for students who encounter them with varying experiences, knowledge, and circumstances. For this reason, I see relevance in examining the language of the text itself. Please see Table 1 for the specific parts of the language excerpts that I will analyze in this section.

Importantly, I call for a critical analysis of the IFC and a broadened definition of what counts as inquiry and literacy. Conversely, other scholars have raised concerns with literacy instruction (particularly for historically underserved students) that ignores superficial features—such as grammar, style, and mechanics—of dominant language practices. Delpit (1992), for example, suggested that teachers should ensure that students are taught the dominant discourses of the school while still privileging students' home language practices. Therefore, I acknowledge and value the importance of having clear and rigorous standards that guide instruction in the library to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to access informational literature, pursue their own inquiries, and develop the complex skills with which to do so.

Introduction to the Information Fluency Continuum

The IFC opens by positioning inquiry as one of the overall aims of the school library, with the goal of empowering students to pursue their own inquiries through books, media, and other forms of text. According to this section of the document, students are considered literate if they are able to ask and answer questions within texts independently; in other words, inquiry is deeply linked with notions of literacy. In clearly defining this inquiry-driven, literate, and empowered learner, the continuum states that "the empowered learner calls upon information/inquiry skills to connect with what he or she knows, ask intriguing questions about what is not known, investigate the answers, construct new understandings, and communicate to share those understandings with others" (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. ii). As the document continues, however, it is evident that being "information fluent" is conceptualized in a very particular way:

> Our young people must go beyond being able to decode information to being able to use appropriate information in any situation; they must be "information fluent" in order to thrive both in and out of school. In addition, like literacy, information fluency must extend in a coherent development continuum throughout the years of schooling, K–12 and beyond. (p. 1)

In taking up Gee's (2005) sign systems and knowledge task, it becomes clear that being an information-fluent reader privileges appropriate information and develops in a linear fashion. This particular excerpt from the introduction, therefore, furthers an assumption that becoming information fluent happens sequentially and over time. Students who do not engage with informational text in the desired way, at the desired stage in the continuum, will likely not be deemed proficient within this sign system (Gee, 2005). Therefore, students who pursue their own inquiries in other media, processes, or formats may find that their repertoire of literacy practices is not recognized or valued (Nixon & Comber, 2006) because they fail to adhere to the sequence as outlined by the standards. In other words, these students may not be seen as "thriving both in and out of school" (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. 1).

Standard 1: Using Inquiry to Build Understanding and Create New Knowledge

The first standard—"using inquiry to build understanding and create new knowledge" (p. 16)—positions inquiry as a powerful tool (see Table 1). Giving students access to this tool positions students as producers of new knowledge, and asks students to employ the process of inquiry to gain access to this new knowledge (Janks, 2010). An emphasis on a linear inquiry process may fail to recognize and value the epistemic privilege or knowledge that students bring to the library based on experience, cultural background, and linguistic practices (Campano & Damico, 2007). Therefore, while positioning inquiry as a powerful tool, the IFC also makes the assumption that knowledge and understanding might be acquired by attending to the steps of this inquiry process. For example, listed below are two of the 37 total indicators for Standard 1, which state that the successful student (a) plans research and follows a timeline; and (b) follows a modeled inquiry process during each visit to the library to do research.

Repeated language such as "follows a timeline" (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. 16) and "follows a modeled inquiry process" (p. 16) signals a particular set of sequential inquiry steps. The steps are outlined as: connect, wonder, investigate, construct, express, and reflect. Though these steps are fluid and allow for an iterative and open-ended learning process (Brown, 2012), the reliance on a trajectory of literacy within this process creates dissonance between the notions of standards and the democratic space that libraries were designed to be. Can we open the space for democratic knowledge while not constructing it in a way that has a linear path that one must follow to arrive at "knowledge" and become literate? For example, constructing the library as an open and collaborative learning commons (Mueller, 2015) may offer students choice without a rigid process.

The first standard outlines the desired inquiry process, from stating the question, to conducting research and presenting findings. As mentioned above, it is broken out into phases (i.e., connect, wonder, investigate, construct, express, and reflect), clearly delineated with more specific indicators for each phase so that librarians can guide students through these steps in the correct order. For example, in the connect phase, there are eight indicators, which take up language such as *understand*, *recognize*, *observe*, *connect* (twice), and *identify* (three times) (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. 5). Therefore, the student who completes each phase of the inquiry process is one who can effectively access and navigate through the discourse (Gee, 2005) of informational literacy. The images of literacy and learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006) promoted by the document are clearly defined for students on a designated path. Presumably, students who follow this prescribed path and are given appropriate materials to conduct their inquiries will be successful. For example, an information-fluent reader who engages in inquiry is expected to be able to "locate nonfiction materials at appropriate reading levels with assistance" (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. 17), which privileges the level of a text over the notion of a compelling text (Brown, 2012).

Additionally, the IFC supports students in the research stage of inquiry, where students are expected to "evaluate information to determine accuracy, currency and relevance for answering questions" (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. 21) by (a) using materials provided to <u>find answers</u> to questions posed, and (b) recognizing <u>facts</u>.

Although the structure and framing of inquiry may be helpful, there are ways in which it may also be limiting. Is having a protocol for the process of inquiry working against the inherent conception of inquiry? Brown (2012) describes inquiry as an approach where students construct knowledge, rather than receive a transfer of knowledge from teacher to student, or materials to student (p. 189). In outlining such precise steps for the research stage of inquiry (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. 21), for example, the standards suggest that students may be deemed successful inquirers if they merely complete inquiry assignments by finding the right answers. However, these narrowly focused assignments might not be inclusive of student knowledge, heritage, and interests (Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010). Consequently, the funds of knowledge (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) and interests that these students bring to the library may not be recognized. In other words, their way of constructing knowledge through particular systems (Gee, 2005) may be outside the

discourse of the library promoted by these standards. Designing library instruction that is inclusive of student knowledge requires a critical approach to the teaching of inquiry and literacy.

Standard 2: Pursuing Personal and Aesthetic Growth

The second standard is less formulaic in comparison to the structured notions of inquiry outlined in the first standard. This standard asks students to make connections between texts, explore texts, and use technology to find information related to their own interests. This standard is based on the presumption that "an independent learner responds to and creates literary and artistic expressions, uses effective strategies for personal exploration of ideas, and reads on his or her own by choice" (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. 34). The IFC positions the ideal student as one who reads for pleasure, reads voraciously, and has formed personal opinions about texts. However, a student's disposition toward reading may be contingent on having access to a diverse collection of texts that is representative of a wide range of student backgrounds and knowledge. Although providing access to diverse texts is an overarching and fundamental goal in the field of library science, the standard itself does not foreground a diversity of texts. A student, then, who is not represented in the texts of the school library or prefers to engage with texts in a more multimodal way, may not meet these standards as outlined on the IFC because she has not been given the opportunity. Although the phrase "favorite books and authors" (p. 37) is used to reference student choice in literacy materials, just because a student does not—or cannot—read voluntarily does not mean that they do not have preferred reading materials. While the standards do not imply that students lack interests, the language assumes that students who are successful in the school library have established favorite books and authors. As Nixon and Comber (2006) contend, some children's knowledge, interests, and cultural practices do not carry as much capital in "schooled literacy" (Cook-Gumperz, 1986, p. 4) or the ways of taking up literacy that are deemed appropriate in schools, as others. Cook-Gumperz argues that it is through this "process of classroom exchanges, learning-group formation, through informal judgments and standardized tests and all the other evaluative apparatus of schooling that our notions of *schooled literacy* are formed" (p. 2, emphasis in original). In these standards, students who have not acquired a "taste" (Dressman, 1997) for favorite books and authors are not seen as meeting standards. Standard 2 of the IFC also positions students as seamlessly connecting their own personal lives and experiences to those that they read about in texts, (a) using prior knowledge to <u>connect</u> to and form <u>personal meaning</u> from fiction, nonfiction and multimedia works; (b) <u>making connections</u> between literature and own experiences; and (c) <u>creating personal meaning</u> from stories and performances (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. 35).

By repeating phrases such as "connect," "make connections," and "form personal meaning," the standards reflect an assumption that all students will be able to see their own experiences reflected in the texts that they read (p. 35). This, of course, depends on the text selections. Situating these statements within Gee's (2005) sign systems and knowledge task, it is clear that those students whose lives match up to the experiences in texts are likely the most successful at navigating—and adhering to—these standards. This language puts the notions of voluntary reading and interests together as one unit, rather

than as two distinct practices that may overlap. Thus, those students who have interests that are reflected in the texts, whether digital, print, or multimodal, will find themselves more adept at navigating the discourses (Gee, 2005) of the library. This is ultimately an issue of equity; the standards privilege students who are represented in school texts, and whose language and literacy practices adhere to notions of schooled literacies (Cook-Gumperz, 1986) at the expense of those students whose literacy practices are marginalized.

Standard 3: Demonstrating Social Responsibility

In the final standard presented in the IFC, the focus on social responsibility becomes paramount. The ideal learner is constructed as a student who (a) begins to associate use of the library with <u>respect for rules and procedures,</u> (b) respects the ideas of others by <u>listening</u> and <u>raising their hand</u> before speaking, and (c) recognizing the right to express their own opinion in an <u>appropriate manner</u> (New York City School Library System, n.d.).

While students have options to build their own knowledge around topics that interest them in the library, they are asked to do so while adhering to "appropriate" social norms, as well as following expected "rules and procedures" (p. 44). However, if students are expected to take up only certain behaviors, engaging in literacy practices only as they adhere to rules and procedures, certain ways of being a reader may be inadvertently closed off (Sumara, 1996). Opening up these standards to ensure that there is not just one way of responding to peers, or respecting the space, might help the third standard become more inclusive of all readers' identities. Despite calls advocating for library media specialists as change agents who openly investigate and challenge inequitable social issues (Kumasi-Johnson, 2007), an accountability paradigm where normed behaviors are written explicitly into the standards leaves little room for resisting inequitable practices.

Other conceptions of a successful student in the library is one who seeks multiple points of view, collaborates with others, and uses multimedia tools in responsible and appropriate manners. For example, Standard 3 states that a student (a) <u>respects</u> the ideas of others, and (b) practices giving <u>positive feedback</u> and <u>compliments</u> as modeled by librarian (New York City School Library System, n.d.).

Phrases such as "respect," "positive feedback," and "compliments as modeled by librarian" (p. 45) depict a specific type of student who embodies particular literacy practices in accordance with the modeling provided by the librarian. For example, while "respect[ing] the ideas of others" (p. 45) may be broadly defined, this is quickly followed with a sequence of behaviors that students are expected to exhibit. When libraries are constructed to teach informational literacy in a linear fashion, and students are expected to embody certain literacy practices, the standards further construct libraries as spaces of schooled literacies—as opposed to the free-flowing space that "inquiry" may conjure. Therefore, students who present well-organized, well-behaved characteristics (Nixon & Comber, 2006) may be deemed more successful at navigating the library, regardless of their efforts or interest in pursuing their own inquiries.

Implications and Conclusions

Although the IFC focuses on inquiry, a narrow discussion of literacy hinders how the text's definition of inquiry may be implemented. Because the knowledge around informational literacy is depicted as developing sequentially, and successful students are portrayed as those who read voraciously and widely, the language of the standards has the potential to exclude particular ways of engaging in literacy. In fact, the phrase "the information-literate student in Grade One has developed the following skills" (New York City School Library System, n.d., p. 30) creates a binary between literate and illiterate. Outlining concrete steps to follow, and positioning informational literacy as something that can be obtained, impacts the knowledge that students can bring to—and construct within—their library instruction. As Janks (2010) reminds us, the binary opposition between literate and illiterate is not clear-cut. Merely because students do not follow the precise steps of inquiry in the precise order at the designated time does not mean that they should, in fact, be deemed information illiterate. Although the library might be a space for students to explore various texts and skills, there are still notions of schooled literacies (Cook-Gumperz, 1986) at work in constructing conceptions of knowledge and success. Therefore, not all students' ways of constructing knowledge, engaging with texts, and pursuing their own inquiries are valued in this document.

The value system placed on a linear development of literacy may exclude those students whose literacies have historically been marginalized in the traditional classroom setting (Kumasi & Hughes-Hassell, 2017), which is an issue of equity. As such, Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell (2017) argued for viewing racialized youth, who have often been positioned as deficient, through a historical and critical lens in order to challenge cultural hegemony in school libraries. As they asserted, "librarians must support the literacy development of racialized youth not only to close the achievement gap, but also because literacy is a powerful tool of voice and agency" (p. 18). An equity-oriented approach to understanding and implementing school library standards, one that resists a narrow conception of literacy, is needed to do this work. Inquiry itself is a political stance, as our own perspectives, ideologies, and assumptions inherently guide our inquiries. Therefore, the way in which student inquiry is framed (Lewis, 2000) is also political. Framing inquiry as apolitical restricts library instruction from taking on a robust social justice stance. I propose that the library is a value-driven and ideological space (Weissinger, 2003), and both the library—as well as the standards that drive it—must continue to be critically examined.

Ultimately, I argue for closer attention to the library as a site for knowledge construction, and the extent to which library standards support—or do not support—that knowledge construction. Given that AASL is currently conducting a review of library standards and program guidelines, which were unpacked and analyzed during the AASL's most recent National Conference, close and critical attention to the language of the standards must continue. The new framework that was shared at the conference included shared commitments to "include, inquire, collaborate, curate, explore, and engage" (School Library Journal, 2017, para. 2). As the IFC continues to evolve through multiple iterations, discursive comparisons between these local standards and the national AASL standards could potentially illuminate how the language of student inquiry and literacy does—or does not—shift over time.

In practice, positioning school librarians as change agents, taking a critical perspective to inquiry, and giving students the tools to exercise their own agency (Kumasi-Johnson, 2007) are feasible steps in ensuring that school libraries are striving for greater social justice. As Vasudevan et al. (2010) found, when given the opportunity to work outside of the school space and to bring students' out-of-school lives into school projects, students were able to resist dominant notions of success. Therefore, I argue that both practitioners' and scholars' conceptions of inquiry, engagements with texts, and social responsibility practices must be widened. Rather than expecting students to follow a sequential set of steps, or to precisely follow a librarian's modeling, libraries could be a space where students have agency to decide when and how they might pursue inquiry. Therefore, continuing to understand and explore how librarians take up the standards, understand them, and implement them in their own practice with students merits additional consideration across the field.

Limitations

While there is value in examining a singular document, particularly one used in the largest public school system in the nation, this study also has limitations. This piece is deliberately contextual, so that only one public school library system has been analyzed. Consequently, these findings are not generalizable to other school systems or student populations. In addition, this account does not explore the influence of the current national school library standards, AASL's *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. The AASL standards support an inquiry stance built on curiosity rather than a prescribed set of steps, place an emphasis on garnering collections of texts that highlight global diversity, and encourage choice and reflection. These standards undoubtedly guide the decisions of school librarians in New York's public schools. Other critical documents, such as ALA's (1996) *Library Bill of Rights & The Freedom to Read Statement*, affirm school libraries as spaces of inquiry and equity. School librarians who are professionally trained will interpret and implement each standard in light of broader professional goals, commitments, and foundations of the profession, regardless of the local context and/or standards. Because this particular study does not take these national foundations and standards into account, it is limited in its claims about school library standards as a whole and how they may influence individual librarians.

Due to these limitations, I do not seek generalization from these findings, but rather validity within my analysis, to produce meaningful findings for the individuals for whom this data is relevant (LeCompte, 2000). It is my intention, then, that elementary-school librarians, as well as NYC educators more broadly, might find the disconnect between conceptions of inquiry (Brown, 2012) and the ways in which it is discussed in the standards as worthy of further investigation and reflection. Of course, I do believe that studying the school library standards in NYC public schools has implications for other contexts, particularly for other urban school systems. In future work, research might explore different school library standards to examine connections and divergences in how literacy across our school libraries is conceptualized, as well as the direct impact of school library standards on literacy practices across the school setting.

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