

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON INFORMATION LITERACY

Fostering a Dialogue for
International Understanding



Edited by the ACRL Student Learning and Information Literacy Committee
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*Advancing learning
Transforming scholarship*

Association of College & Research Libraries

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Global Perspectives on Information Literacy

Fostering a Dialogue for International Understanding

Edited by the ACRL Student Learning and Information Literacy Committee, Global Perspectives on Information Literacy Working Group

With a Foreword by Emma Coonan

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Contents

I. Executive Summary	5
II. Introduction	9
III. Foreword by Emma Coonan, Information Skills Librarian,..... University of East Anglia, Norwich, England, United Kingdom	13
IV. Chapters	
A. Dr. Noa Aharony, Head, Department of Information	17
Science, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel	
B. William Badke, Associate Librarian, Associated Canadian Theological	22
Schools and Information Literacy, Trinity Western University, Langley, British Columbia, Canada	
C. Cara Bradley, Liaison Services Coordinator,	29
University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada	
D. Sophie Bury, Head, Bronfman Business Library,.....	36
York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada	
E. Dr. Daniel G. Dorner, Information Management Consultant,	47
Wellington, New Zealand	
F. Dr. Jesús Lau, Director, Professor and Advisor to the General.....	60
Directorate of Academic Development and Education Innovation, Universidad Veracruzana, Veracruz Campus, Boca del Río, Veracruz, México	
G. Andrew Mwesigwa, Academic Librarian and Head, Digitisation/Repository	69
Section, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, East Africa	
H. Dr. Jaya Raju, Associate Professor and Head, Library and Information.....	77
Studies Centre, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa and Dr. Reggie Raju, Deputy Director, Research & Learning, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa	
I. Elizabeth A. Russell, Head, Center for Digital Scholarship, New York.....	87
University Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates and Meggan Houlihan, First Year Experience and Instruction Librarian, New York University Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates	
J. Dr. Jane Secker, Copyright and Digital Literacy Advisor, London School of.....	99
Economics and Political Science, England, United Kingdom	
K. Dr. Sonja Špiranec, Associate Professor in Humanities and Social Sciences,	110
Department of Information & Communication Sciences, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia	

L. Dr. Maria-Carme Torras, Library Director, University of Bergen,..... Bergen, Norway	121
M. Dr. Li Wang, Learning Support Services Manager, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand	130
V. Reflection.....	145
VI. Author Biographies	150
VII. Acknowledgements.....	156

CHAPTER L

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Region: Europe

Introduction

My work with information literacy (IL) started in 2003, when I was hired as a senior academic librarian at the University of Bergen Libraries, Norway. The insights into IL education provided in this paper are thus from the perspective of a practitioner. I have also been a member of the Information Literacy Section at the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) since 2005. I chaired the section from 2009 to 2013. I am currently a member of the IFLA Governing Board. Advocacy for IL as key to access to information is on our strategic agenda. Further, I have collaborated closely with UNESCO on initiatives to build capacity and to promote IL worldwide from a multidisciplinary perspective.^[1] More specifically, I have contributed to IFLA's collaboration with UNESCO intergovernmental Information for All Program (IFAP).^[2] I am also a member of the international steering committee of the UNESCO initiated Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy (GAPMIL).^[3]

Constant interests in my career have been building the capacity of library staff as IL educators and enhancing the role of academic libraries as real partners in education and research. My interests are reflected in my publications^[4] and in the variety of national and international initiatives to train trainers in IL in which I have participated. Bringing about change in academic libraries to adapt to the information and educational environment has become an increasing concern for me in my current position as library director.^[5]

There is no single organization or body that is responsible for IL in Norway, but changes in the higher education landscape have had a clear impact on the development of IL. Back in the early 2000s, when I started working at the University of Bergen, Norwegian academic libraries were building teaching capacity in order to improve their user education. The Norwegian Quality Reform, introduced in 2002 as a result of the European Bologna process in higher education, required a focus on student active learning and frequent assignment writing.^[6] Norwegian higher education institutions recognized a need to develop student critical thinking, academic integrity, writing, and information-searching skills. Against this background, the role of the library as an educational partner in student learning gained visibility. Many academic libraries seized this opportunity and made information literacy education a strategic priority. The state of practice before the Quality Reform was that library courses had a strong focus on source- and teacher-centered bibliographic instruction. They were generally not embedded in the curricula. Not all library staff members recognized teaching and counseling students and researchers as a library core activity, and neither did faculty. Therefore changing mind sets inside and outside the library became just as critical for success as professional development and resource allocation.

I was charged to lead the library teaching group at the University of Bergen. The group was tasked to develop IL programs at the University Library. My academic background and teaching experience were seen as valuable to this work. We were asked to identify professional development needs and suggest relevant capacity building, as well as developing IL courses and materials, both face-to-face and online. Close collaboration with faculty and embedded IL education in the curricula were important goals for the library to achieve.

The Norwegian Qualifications Framework, introduced in 2009, has been decisive to embedding IL in the curricula.^[7] This framework builds upon the *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*.^[8] It describes learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, and general competencies) expected from all candidates after each completed educational cycle (BA, MA, and PhD). Some of the listed learning outcomes directly relate to IL, which means that IL competencies need to be included in the learning outcomes description of degree programs and courses. In turn, there must be an alignment between expected learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment, which has made easier the task of embedding IL education in the curriculum. Given these formal requirements, it seems reasonable to think that IL is well integrated in Norwegian higher education.

Models of Information Literacy

Although Norwegian library and information science education is changing, there has been little educational and learning theory in the curriculum. This means that library practitioners need professional development right from the outset. In-house training, mentoring, and attendance of seminars, conferences, and university teaching development programs are important initiatives to build the library staff's educational capacity. The recruitment of academic librarians specializing in educational theory and pedagogy has also been very valuable to building capacity at the library.

Pedagogical practice is the result of specific values, underpinning learning theories and professional experience. An essential goal in building capacity at the academic library has been to establish common educational knowledge and a practice base or platform. This has had a dual purpose. One has obviously been to empower library staff as educators. The other purpose has been to trigger a change of mind sets, from conceptions of teaching as a secondary, ad hoc library task, heavily teacher- and source-centered, to an understanding of teaching as a core library activity that is student- and learning-centered. Constructivism and sociocultural theory lie at the heart of this paradigm shift away from traditional bibliographic instruction. Bibliographic instruction builds upon a behavioristic approach, which looks upon learning as knowledge transmission from teacher to student. From a constructivist perspective, we understand learning as a process of meaning construction. Learning happens by doing and reflecting. The teacher facilitates learning situations where students engage with real problem solving. These learning situations support student knowledge construction. Sociocultural theory has been very influential in Norwegian education over the last thirty years. From this theoretical perspective, learning is understood as a social phenomenon. Learning occurs through engaging with activities in interaction with others in a given context. Teachers and peer students act as mediators and help the student advance in his or her learning process.

From the constructivist perspective, Carol Kuhlthau's Information Search Process (ISP) has been central to the development of our teaching practice at the library, as well as her insights into librarian intervention in the student's learning process.^[9] Kuhlthau describes information searching as a process consisting of the following stages: task initiation, topic selection, pre-focus exploration, focus formulation, information collection, and search closure. The ISP encompasses specific feelings, thoughts, and actions at each stage. Her insights into the ISP and educational intervention have been extremely helpful in developing an understanding of the variety of librarian roles in teaching and guiding students. Maria-Carme Torras and Tove Pemmer Sætre provide a discussion of counseling models for the academic librarian.^[10]

The value of Kuhlthau's work can be illustrated by giving some attention to the pre-focus exploration stage of the ISP. In Kuhlthau's view, this is the most challenging stage for students.

Students try to obtain a general overview of the selected topic. They identify key issues in order to narrow down their topic and formulate a preliminary research question. They locate relevant information and may read a lot, trying to relate the information from different sources to their existing knowledge. They may easily feel that they are drowning in a sea of information. Feelings of uncertainty, confusion, and frustration are associated with unclear thoughts about the research question. As thoughts become more focused gradually, they give way to feelings of increased confidence. Even though uncertainty is part and parcel of the research process, it can hinder student progress if it becomes too dominant. The question is then how the librarian can best support the student at this stage. As Gunnar Handal and Per Lauvås point out, supervisors need to be able to change counseling styles in accordance with where the student is in the research process.^[11] Drawing upon Handal and Lauvås's work and Kuhlthau's intervention categories (e.g., identifier, counselor), Torras and Sætre discuss a multiplicity of counseling roles for librarians.^[12]

In the research process, the ISP goes hand in hand with the academic writing process. Kuhlthau points at some of the connections between the two processes. Understanding the relationship between information searching, academic writing, and learning is necessary to design IL education that is appropriately tailored to the student's situation and needs. Unlike in the United States, Norwegian universities do not have a tradition of embedded academic writing in the curricula. The extent to which students receive academic writing instruction in the course of their studies may vary from institution to institution and from degree to degree. From a socioconstructivist perspective, the work of Norwegian scholar Olga Dysthe and her colleagues has been central to developing our understanding of academic writing and its connections with information searching and use.^[13]

For Dysthe writing is key to learning throughout the research process. She singles out writing "for thinking" as a useful method that helps students clarify, formulate, and organize their thoughts. Writing for thinking is not meant as a final product for assignment. It is private, informal, exploratory, and process-oriented. Dysthe and her colleagues further claim that this kind of writing helps internalize knowledge and activate the unconscious. In their view, writing helps students with their information searching, just as searching and reading information help them progress in their writing. Writing is dependent on reading selected literature about a

topic. At the same time, selecting literature is dependent on good information-searching skills. Writing should start as early as possible in the research process. Early writing can help students define their information needs more easily. Further, writing before reading helps students to formulate their own thoughts, without drowning in all the authoritative voices of the field. As one reads, writing helps establish a dialogue with the literature and gain a personal understanding of it. A question worth exploring for librarians is what kind of role they may play in the student's academic writing process. For instance, Torras and Sætre discuss the potential texts for thinking can have in the interaction between students and librarians to support the student's creative development of ideas and concepts at the early stages of the research process.^[14] The attention to academic writing in library user education is bringing about some very interesting developments in academic support, which I will address in the next section.

Theory and Practice = Praxis

The development of IL education at Norwegian academic libraries in the 2000s was characterized by the production of open educational resources. The open IL tutorial Search and Write (Søk og Skriv) provides a good example of IL education that builds upon Kuhlthau's ISP model.^[15] This tutorial was originally developed to improve BA and MA students' information-searching and referencing skills.

As regards PhD students and young researchers, we gradually realized that Search and Write, as most of our face-to-face IL education, did not address their specific needs in a satisfactory way. We also recognized the need to work in a more evidence-based way, if we were to succeed in providing relevant IL education for this target group. Taking a collaborative approach to this challenge, we embarked on the Nordic project Information Management for Knowledge Creation.^[16] Firstly we carried out a study to gain a better understanding of PhD students' information needs and behavior. The study consisted of a systematic literature review and focus group interviews of supervisors and PhD candidates at different stages of their doctoral work at a selection of Norwegian and Danish universities.^[17] The study revealed support needs like publishing strategies to improve research visibility and more effective literature searching, especially in interdisciplinary research. Based on the study findings, we developed the online tutorial PhD on Track, which has the following components: reviewing and discovering research, sharing and publishing it, and evaluating and ranking it.^[18]

Both Search and Write and PhD on Track are being continuously developed. The tutorials have not only proved to be a useful resource for students, but they have also been a good tool for professional development, as well as providing faculty and librarians with relevant teaching materials.

For some time now, academic libraries in Norway, as in other Nordic countries, have recognized the need to bring their IL education closer to academic writing instruction. The literature in both academic writing and IL points at similar student challenges and areas where support is needed. Examples of challenges are selecting what to read from a large amount of available sources, narrowing down a research question from a general topic, structuring a text, drawing conclusions, and referencing and documenting sources to support one's arguments. Despite the overlaps between academic writing instruction and IL education, they have lived

quite separate lives in Norwegian higher education. Fortunately, there is now a growing interest in joining in efforts and expertise. Academic libraries and faculty members specializing in academic writing have been exploring new opportunities to develop a more holistic approach to student academic support at our universities. Collaboration has been fruitful in the further development of the online tutorial Search and Write. Usage statistics, as well as student and expert evaluations, have revealed a need to incorporate academic writing components in the tutorial. Modules on academic reading and writing have now been produced in collaboration with academic writing specialists at the University of Bergen.

Academic writing theory and practice are also having an impact on face-to-face library user education. An exciting development in the collaboration between information literacy and academic writing specialists is the emergence of academic writing centers in Norwegian higher education. Over the last six years approximately, ten academic writing centers have been created at higher education institutions all over the country, many of them inspired by US academic writing centers.

There are variations in the way these centers are organized and resourced, as well as in the range of services they offer, but they all try to foster collaboration between faculty staff, academic writing specialists, and librarians. The writing center at the University of Bergen is an interesting case in the way it aims to integrate and embed its services. The center was established as a joint pilot project (2014–2016) between the University Library and the Arts and Humanities Faculty. The center is located at the Humanities Library and staffed by academic librarians, faculty academic writing specialists, and student tutors. The main center activities are individual counseling, composition workshops and other courses—some of them curriculum embedded—tutor training, as well as research and development work. The center moves away from IL education and academic writing instruction as disconnected support activities. Through close collaboration, the center staff aim to design a model of academic support that brings in appropriate expertise and activities at different stages of the student research process.^[19] Academic writing expertise in composition, argumentation, and text structure blends with library expertise in efficient information searching and referencing styles, for example. The result is better tailored and more frequent intervention in the student's research process. Student learning benefits from the academic writing teacher, the librarian, and peer students' interaction and feedback along the way.

At the center, obvious questions arise concerning responsibilities, expertise, and task sharing. "Trespassing" traditionally established boundaries of authority is a particularly challenging issue. The role and legitimacy of the academic writing center when compared to those of faculty lecturers and supervisors are not matters of easy definition or consensus. Both academic writing and IL specialists recognize the need to increase their knowledge of each other's area of expertise. The writing center makes a good arena for mutual capacity building and for training others, such as newly recruited staff and student tutors.

An evaluation of the center is being carried out at the time of writing. The evaluation will be important to deciding on the future of the center. There is an expressed interest in extending the writing center services to the rest of the faculties. Initially the writing center was

established for Arts and Humanities students, but in practice it serves students from other faculties as well. My concern, which I share with the rest of the university management and my center colleagues, is how to work out a sustainable model for the writing center, especially at a time of growing economic austerity.

Future Visioning and Reflection

It is difficult to make predictions about the future of IL in Norwegian higher education. Looking back, I see that IL education has really been embraced as a core library task. For the last fifteen years, libraries have developed their teaching capacity, designed courses and materials, and worked hard for IL embedding in the curriculum. Nevertheless, successful stories of embedded IL education and close faculty-library collaboration do not guarantee that our IL practice actually contributes to student deep learning. There are some warnings in the IL literature that concern me. Louise Limberg and Olof Sundin, amongst others, observe that student learning may be limited by narrow conceptions of IL.^[20] Narrow conceptions lead to teaching practice that focuses on procedure and tools rather than on knowledge content, and on defining information needs and search terms, rather than on developing the research question. Wendy Holliday and Jim Rogers find that classroom discourse may also strengthen the focus on finding sources rather than on learning about a topic.^[21] Narrow conceptions of IL do not support deep learning. Rather, they promote a student understanding of research as fact finding and as locating an adequate number of right sources. In my view, narrow conceptions of IL can be reinforced when IL education is delivered with a disconnect between librarian and lecturer learning activities, despite formal embedding in the curriculum.

Assessing IL learning outcomes has not been a priority in Norwegian higher education. As a consequence, it is difficult for academic libraries to evaluate the impact of their teaching on student learning and to demonstrate its value. It is my impression that assessing learning has felt like a daunting task for libraries, partly because they generally lack expertise in assessment of learning. On the other hand, there is still some disconnect between library and faculty, which makes it difficult to understand assessment as a joint responsibility. If Norwegian higher education is to move forward with IL education, assessment is a task that can no longer be postponed.

On a more positive note, I think that the academic writing center, with its convergence of IL and academic writing support, grants us a unique opportunity to redesign library education. As I mentioned above, academic writing is generally not embedded in the curriculum, but information literacy is. This gives us a good platform for rethinking and trying out new ways of delivering not only IL education, but also academic support on the whole. If lecturers, academic writing specialists, and librarians join in efforts, we can design better learning activities that promote critical thinking, analysis, scrutiny, and a deeper understanding of a topic. The aim is to design academic support for deep learning. Turning this aim into reality will require a thorough discussion of roles, responsibilities, and task sharing. In addition, at a strategic level, we need to make sure that IL and academic writing are on the university agenda. In the case of the University of Bergen, the action plan for the new strategy (2016–2022) includes developing library and writing center services as a specific action to create an attractive university learning

environment. At an organizational level, roles and responsibilities need to be clearly assigned. The Teaching and Learning Board at the University of Bergen is having discussions about whether the academic writing center should be a centralized unit serving the whole campus or whether services should be faculty-based. In the current climate of budget cuts, resource allocation is a challenging issue that hinders progress in our conversations. Professional development is necessary as well, but this is a more easily attainable goal, when one thinks about all the expertise that the different stakeholders at the university have and can share with each other.

Finally, I would like to single out online IL education on campus and in blended and distance education as one task that will be intensified in the near future. Online education is transforming learning. Libraries need to increase their knowledge of digital education so that they can understand their role in the digital environment. The library at the University of Tromsø has just released iKOMP, the first Norwegian student MOOC in information literacy.^[22] More attention needs to be devoted to digital IL education. At a Scandinavian level, the University Libraries of Aarhus, Bergen, and Lund have initiated a NORDPLUS-funded joint project to strengthen the role of the digital academic library as a scholarly resource and as an educational partner in Nordic higher education.^[23] The main deliverables of this project are building capacity, establishing a Nordic IL community of practice, and developing open educational resources to enhance the quality of learning in the digital environment.

Notes

- [1] An example of my contribution is this publication: Alton Grizzle and Maria-Carme Torras, eds., *Media and Information Literacy* (Paris: UNESCO, 2013).
- [2] Information for All Programme (IFAP) website, accessed January 20, 2017, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/intergovernmental-programmes/information-for-all-programme-ifap>. For an overview of IFLA and IFAP collaboration, see Maria-Carme Torras, "IFAP-IFLA Collaborative Activities in the Period 2008–2013," in *Information for All Programme (IFAP) Report 2008–2013* (Paris: UNESCO, 2014), 97–98.
- [3] GAPMIL (Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy) website, accessed January 20, 2017, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/gapmil>.
- [4] Among my publications on IL education and the role of academic libraries, I would like to highlight the following: Maria-Carme Torras, "Access to Knowledge as a Social Practice: Information Literacy Education for MA Students," in *Libraries Driving Access to Knowledge*, ed. Jesús Lau, Anna Maria Tammaro, and Theo Bothma (Munich: Saur, 2012), 191–213; Maria-Carme Torras and Tove Pemmer Sætre, *Information Literacy Education* (Oxford: Chandos, 2009); Therese Skagen, Maria-Carme Torras, Sissel Hafstad, Irene Hunskaar, Solveig Kavli, and Susanne Mikki, "Pedagogical Considerations in Developing an Online Tutorial in Information Literacy," *Communications in Information Literacy* 2, no. 2 (2008): 84–98; Maria-Carme Torras and Therese Skagen, "User Education at the Digital Library: Physical and Intellectual Access to Information through Digital Literacy," in *Aspects of the Digital Library*, ed. Kari Garnes Ane Landøy, and Angela Repanovici (Laksevåg, Norway: Alvheim og Eide Akademisk Forlag, 2006), 75–86.
- [5] See, for instance, discussions in Andrew Whitworth, Maria-Carme Torras, Bodil Moss, Nazareth A. Kifle, and Terje Blåsternes, "Changing Libraries: Facilitating Self-Reflection and Action Research on Organizational Change in Academic Libraries," *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 20, no. 2 (2014): 251–74.
- [6] Kunnskapsdepartementet, "Kvalitetsreformen," August 14, 2002, <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/kvalitetsreformen-agust-2002/id87898>.

- [7] Kunnskapsdepartementet, “Nasjonal kvalifikasjonsrammeverket for høyere utdanning,” last modified October 13, 2014, <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/utdanning/hoyere-utdanning/nasjonalt-kvalifikasjonsrammeverk/id564809>.
- [8] European Union, *The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*, accessed September 11, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/leaflet_en.pdf.
- [9] Carol C. Kuhlthau, *Seeking Meaning*, 2nd ed. (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004).
- [10] Torras and Sætre, *Information Literacy Education*.
- [11] Gunnar Handal and Per Lauvås, *Forskningsveilederen* (Oslo, Norway: Cappelen, 2006).
- [12] Torras and Sætre, *Information Literacy Education*.
- [13] Olga Dysthe, “Writing at Norwegian Universities in an International Perspective: From Indirect Strategies of Strengthening Writing to the ‘Quality Reform,’” in *Teaching Academic Writing in European Higher Education*, ed. Lennart Björk, Gerd Bräuer, and Lotte Rienecker (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 151–64; Olga Dysthe, “What Factors Influence the Improvement of Academic Writing Practices? A Study of Reform of Undergraduate Writing in Norwegian Higher Education,” in *Traditions of Writing Research*, ed. Charles Bazerman, Krut Robert, Karen Lunsford, Susan McLeod, Suzie Null, Paul Rogers, and Amanda Stansell (New York: Routledge, 2010), 31–43; Olga Dysthe, Frøydis Hertzberg, and Torlaug L. Hoel, *Skrive for å lære: Skrivning i høyere utdanning* (Oslo, Norway: Abstrakt forlag, 2000).
- [14] Torras and Sætre, *Information Literacy Education*.
- [15] Search and Write was developed jointly by the academic libraries at the University of Bergen, Oslo; Bergen University College; and the Norwegian School of Economics. The tutorial is available at <http://www.sokogskriv.no/en>.
- [16] Information Management for Knowledge Creation (2010–2013) was a joint project between the libraries at the Universities of Oslo, Bergen, Aalborg, and the libraries at the Bergen University College and the Norwegian School of Economics.
- [17] Eystein Gullbekk, Tove Rullestad, and Maria-Carme Torras, eds., “PhD Candidates and the Research Process: The Library’s Contribution,” in *Skrifter fra Universitetsbiblioteket i Oslo 8* (Oslo, Norway: University of Oslo, 2013), <http://www.ub.uio.no/om/skrifter/hefte08.pdf>.
- [18] PhD on Track is available at <http://www.phdontrack.net>.
- [19] Maria-Carme Torras and Pål Steiner, “Information Literacy and Academic Writing: Intertwined Processes, Integrated Services” (keynote presentation, Creating Knowledge VIII Conference, Reykjavik, Iceland, June 1–3, 2016), abstract accessed September 11, 2016, <http://www.upplysing.is/?Page=509>.
- [20] Louise Limberg and Olof Sundin, “Teaching Information Seeking: Relating Information Literacy Education to Theories of Information Behavior,” *Information Research* 12, no. 1 (2006), <http://www.informationr.net/ir/12-1/paper280.html>.
- [21] Wendy Holiday and Jim Rogers, “Talking about Information Literacy: The Mediating Role of Discourse in a College Writing Classroom,” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 13, no. 3 (2013): 257–71.
- [22] iKOMP is available at https://openedx.bibsys.no/courses/UB-Result/iKOMP/2015_TI/about.
- [23] NORDPLUS project NPHE-2016/10142, “Det digitale universitetsbibliotek som videnskabende ressource og pædagogisk aktør i nordisk universitetsuddannelse.”

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