

Cultivating citizen diplomats: information diplomacy as pedagogy in contested information environments

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to introduce information diplomacy as pedagogy, a model for operationalizing the Association of College and Research Libraries Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education in civic and global contexts. The model integrates experiential learning with public diplomacy principles to prepare students as ethical, strategic communicators in contested information environments.

Design/methodology/approach – A dual-case design evaluated the model in two contexts: a US undergraduate course on mis/disinformation and a Finnish graduate seminar on infodemic management. Data included open-ended surveys, student reflections and instructor field notes, analyzed thematically through the lens of the ACRL framework, Kolb's experiential cycle and information diplomacy anchors.

Findings – Students progressed from conceptual understanding to applied civic practice, reporting increased ability to evaluate authority, trace information value and engage in trust-building communication. Deliverables such as policy briefs, social listening tools and infodemic reports demonstrated real-world application, with several adopted by external partners. The model proved adaptable across intercultural settings, though participation dynamics and time constraints highlighted areas for refinement.

Research limitations/implications – Findings derive from small cohorts and a single researcher-instructor, limiting generalizability. Future work should expand to cross-institutional collaborations, incorporate mixed-method assessments and evaluate long-term civic engagement outcomes.

Practical implications – Educators can use this model to deepen the civic dimensions of information literacy, equipping students to become ethical communicators and reflective collaborators.

Social implications – As societies face polarization and declining trust, fostering inclusive, trust-centered information environments is critical. This pedagogy enables students to counter sharp power through soft power practices rooted in reciprocity and dialogue.

Originality/value – This study extends the ACRL framework into a globally engaged pedagogical model, bridging information literacy, experiential learning and public diplomacy to cultivate citizen diplomats prepared for democratic resilience.

Keywords Information literacy, Misinformation, Soft power, Disinformation, Public diplomacy, Information diplomacy, Sharp power

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In today's dynamic and contested information environment, the need for robust information literacy instruction is more urgent than ever (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). Students are



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not only consumers of academic content but also active participants in ecosystems shaped by global crises (Buehler *et al.*, 2021), political instability (Monsees, 2023) and algorithmic media flows (Pérez-Escolar *et al.*, 2023; Noble, 2018). They face pressing civic and strategic questions: How do I distinguish credible information from persuasive messaging? What role should I play in amplifying or resisting public narratives that shape opinion at home and across borders? And what responsibilities do I carry when participating in domestic and global information spaces where influence, trust and truth are contested?

This paper introduces Information Diplomacy as Pedagogy, a practice-based instructional model for operationalizing the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in a contentious, globally interconnected information ecosystem. The model responds to the challenges students face in navigating information spaces shaped by both soft power – such as education, cultural diplomacy and international communication (Nye, 2018) – and sharp power – including the intentional spread of misleading information (dis/malinformation), surveillance, algorithmic bias and strategic media manipulation (Walker and Ludwig, 2017). Grounded in the ACRL Framework and sequenced through Kolb’s experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 2013), the model prepares learners to evaluate information critically and to engage with it ethically and strategically as civic participants and public communicators.

The ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (ACRL, 2016) offers a compelling foundation for academic instruction. Its six threshold concepts – authority is constructed and contextual; information creation as a process; information has value; research as inquiry; scholarship as conversation; and searching as strategic exploration – encourage students to interrogate how information is produced, disseminated and evaluated. Yet despite its conceptual richness, educators often lack concrete pedagogical models for translating these abstract frames into learning experiences that foster civic agency and ethical engagement, especially in public-facing, high-stakes settings (Cook, 2023; Machin-Mastromatteo, 2017).

Building on Nzomo and Fehrmann’s (2020) emphasis on information literacy’s ties to advocacy and civic participation, this model integrates three strands: (1) the ACRL Framework, which defines the core concepts students must master; (2) Kolb’s experiential learning theory, which structures how students cycle through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984); and (3) insights from *information diplomacy*, a term coined by Emily Metzgar (2021) in her commentary on US international broadcasting. We extend Metzgar’s framing beyond the realm of state-driven communication to a pedagogical context, defining information diplomacy as the deliberate, credible use of information to engage diverse publics, build trust and advance democratic discourse in contested information environments.

To illustrate the model’s adaptability, we applied it in two instructional cases: an undergraduate course in Spring and Fall 2022 – developed in partnership with diplomatic stakeholders and assessed via open-ended surveys at the start, midpoint and end of the semesters – and a graduate infodemic management seminar in Fall 2023 during a research exchange at a Finnish university, examined through instructor field notes. These complementary contexts demonstrate how Information Diplomacy as Pedagogy can support student learning gains and be tailored to intercultural settings.

2. Literature review

This review situates Information Diplomacy as Pedagogy at the intersection of three literatures: information literacy theory, experiential learning and public diplomacy. Each contributes critical insights for designing civic- and global-oriented instruction.

2.1 Information literacy theory via the ACRL framework

The ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (ACRL, 2016) articulates six threshold concepts – authority is constructed and contextual; information creation as a process; information has value; research as inquiry; scholarship as conversation; and searching as strategic exploration – that invite students to question how information is produced, evaluated and circulated in sociocultural and political contexts. By shifting emphasis from tool mastery to conceptual interrogation, the framework encourages learners to examine whose perspectives are validated and how knowledge claims gain traction. Yet practitioners consistently report barriers when applying these abstract frames to civic or community settings, citing limited time, lack of faculty buy-in and difficulty connecting concepts to students' lived experiences (Chomintra, 2023; Hsieh *et al.*, 2021).

Paul Cook (2023) critiques conventional tool-based approaches, such as fact-checking checklists, as inadequate for grappling with the affective and ideological dimensions of today's information flows. He warns that reducing information literacy to procedural tasks risks producing "naïve consumers" rather than critical participants in public discourse. Extending this critique, Locke *et al.* (2023) argue that Western education's focus on individual achievement undermines collective responsibility, leaving students ill-equipped to tackle public problems like disinformation and polarization. From this perspective, the ACRL Framework offers not only pedagogical constructs but also a civic infrastructure. The framework defines the *what* – specifying the core conceptual competencies students must master to critically and responsibly engage with information in civic and global contexts.

2.2 Experiential learning as instructional foundation

David Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984) complements the ACRL Framework by outlining the process through which learners move from conceptual understanding to applied practice. Kolb defines experiential learning as a process where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. His four-phase cycle – (1) concrete experience; (2) reflective observation; (3) abstract conceptualization; and (4) active experimentation – models learning as an iterative transformation of experience into knowledge. Saltmarsh (1996) further emphasizes that reflection and active testing of ideas are equally vital, a principle borne out in international service-learning studies where strategies such as structured reflection yielded significant gains in students' intercultural competence and civic awareness (Chan *et al.*, 2021).

Kolb and Kolb (2005) further highlight how experiential approaches can foster interdisciplinary engagement, metacognition and civic identity when learning environments are psychologically safe and relationally dynamic. Clark (2021) demonstrates how service-learning deepens students' awareness of social contexts and ethical responsibilities by centering community voices in long-term partnerships. Kolb's cycle provides the *how* – structuring assignments such as social listening tool design and infodemic insights reports so that students engage in concrete tasks, reflect critically, connect these experiences to conceptual insights and experiment with solutions to evolving civic challenges.

2.3 Public diplomacy and the strategic use of information

Public diplomacy, as our final strand, examines how governments, institutions and nonstate actors use information to shape relationships, influence decision-making and sustain democratic resilience. We position information diplomacy – as used by Emily Metzgar (2021) in her commentary on US international broadcasting – as a contemporary, pedagogical extension of this tradition. In our model, information diplomacy refers to the deliberate, credible use of information to engage diverse publics, build trust and advance

democratic discourse in contested information environments. Pedagogically, this translates into four strategic anchors: agenda-setting, persuasive framing, information dissemination and relationship-building, which guide the civic purpose of every assignment.

While public diplomacy broadly encompasses a spectrum of communicative activities aimed at fostering mutual understanding across borders, information diplomacy narrows the focus to information's role as both a strategic and ethical resource. This framing is essential in classroom contexts that prepare learners to operate within globally networked information ecosystems where competing narratives, political pressures and technological infrastructures shape public opinion.

Joseph Nye's (2018) distinction between soft power – persuasion through attraction – and sharp power – coercive manipulation – underscores the contested landscapes students must navigate. Walker and Ludwig (2017) document how authoritarian regimes weaponize information infrastructures, while Jaeger (2025) warns of domestic censorship trends that erode democratic norms. In contrast, Scott-Smith (2020) and Mueller (2020) illustrate how exchange and citizen diplomacy programs cultivate participants who act as multipliers of civic values.

Public diplomacy principles establish the *why* – framing information as a strategic civic resource – while our pedagogical adaptation through information diplomacy specifies how that resource can be credibly and ethically mobilized by students in both domestic and international contexts.

3. Conceptual framework

This study weaves together the ACRL Framework, Kolb's experiential learning cycle, and principles from public diplomacy into a unified pedagogical model that equips students to navigate – and ethically intervene in – contested, globally networked information environments. At the center of this integration is information diplomacy, our pedagogical extension of Emily Metzgar's (2021) commentary on the role of credible information in US international broadcasting. In our usage, *information diplomacy* refers to the strategic and ethical mobilization of information to build trust, foster civic resilience and engage diverse publics – both domestically and internationally – in contested spaces.

In this model:

- (1) The ACRL framework defines *what* students must learn: core conceptual competencies for critical, responsible engagement with information.
- (2) Kolb's experiential learning cycle structures *how* students learn: sequencing assignments to transform experience into knowledge and applied skill.
- (3) Public diplomacy principles, adapted here into information diplomacy anchors, articulate *why* strategic, ethical communication is vital: linking classroom work to the civic imperatives of democratic resilience and intercultural trust-building.

Together, they establish Information Diplomacy as Pedagogy: a civic-and-strategic approach that translates threshold concepts like evaluating authority, tracing information value and navigating knowledge systems into actionable practices for engaging in high-stakes public discourse.

3.1 Grounding in the ACRL framework

The ACRL Framework's six threshold concepts serve as the *what*, each paired with a corresponding civic application. These civic applications were developed through an iterative design process that mapped each threshold concept to a concrete, real-world action

students could take to address contested information environments. This mapping drew on three sources: (1) the dispositions and knowledge practices already embedded in the framework; (2) competencies for ethical, strategic engagement identified in public diplomacy literature; and (3) insights from prior service-learning and information literacy instruction developed and taught by the author. The resulting pairings translate each abstract concept into a participatory civic strategy, ensuring that students not only understand the principle but also know how to enact it in community and global contexts (Table 1).

3.2 Instructional sequencing via Kolb's experiential learning cycle

Kolb's experiential learning cycle prescribes how learners progress – sequencing assignments into engagement, reflection, conceptualization and application. The learning activities for each phase were aligned with ACRL competencies and their civic applications, and refined through prior experience in service-learning, infodemic management training and civic technology projects (Table 2).

3.3 Public diplomacy concepts inform course design

Public diplomacy, the broader practice of fostering mutual understanding across borders, provides the *why*. Our pedagogical adaptation translates this into four information diplomacy anchors: agenda-setting, persuasive framing, information dissemination and relationship-building. These anchors were paired with civic strategies by linking established public diplomacy functions to course objectives and classroom-tested activities (Table 3).

3.4 Narrative integration mapping

Each instructional activity is deliberately positioned at the intersection of three elements:

- *ACRL frame*: the conceptual goal, defining *what* competency is being addressed.
- *Kolb's stage*: the pedagogical sequence, structuring *how* the learning unfolds.
- *Diplomacy anchor*: the civic strategy, clarifying *why* the skill matters in contested, globally networked information environments.

Table 1. Mapping the ACRL framework to civic application

ACRL frame	Civic application
Authority is constructed and contextual	Analyzing how credibility is constructed across cultural and geopolitical contexts
Information has value	Examining the ethical, economic and political dimensions of information
Scholarship as conversation	Engaging in reflective synthesis to shape public discourse
Research as inquiry	Supporting iterative, community-driven inquiry into real-world problems
Information creation as a process	Creating and refining public-facing tools through ethical design processes
Searching as strategic exploration	Navigating diverse sources to identify gaps, evaluate trust and triangulate

Source(s): Table by author

Table 2. Mapping Kolb’s experiential learning cycle to learning activities

Kolb’s stage	Learning activity
Concrete experience	Engaging with real-world data, diplomatic workflows and multilingual media
Reflective observation	Reflecting on assumptions, emotional reactions and ethical tensions
Abstract conceptualization	Synthesizing experiences through readings, discussions and hypothesis-building
Active experimentation	Applying insights to deliverables such as tool prototypes and public reports

Source(s): Table by author

Table 3. Mapping information diplomacy anchors to civic strategies

Information diplomacy anchor	Civic strategy
Agenda-setting	Shaping public attention by framing civic challenges
Persuasive framing	Crafting accessible, ethical and culturally resonant messaging
Information dissemination	Determining strategic channels, timing and formats for civic impact
Relationship-building	Facilitating iterative feedback and trust-building with stakeholders

Source(s): Table by author

This mapping ensures that activities are not isolated assignments but integrated experiences in which conceptual knowledge, applied practice and civic purpose reinforce one another. Activities were selected and designed to be:

- flexible across contexts – adaptable to different disciplines and institutional settings;
- responsive to emerging events – incorporating live, evolving information challenges; and
- co-created with partners – whether community-based or international.

Example 1: Social listening and infodemic logs

- *Frame:* Information has value;
- *Kolb:* Concrete experience to reflective observation;
- *Anchor:* Information dissemination and relationship-guilding; and
- *Assignment:* Students conducted social-media audits to surface health narratives (concrete experience), then reflected on emotional and ethical tensions (reflective observation). In partnership with a community organization, they co-created infodemic logs – structured records of misinformation incidents (source, date, theme and impact). Logs were disseminated to stakeholders to guide outreach efforts.

Example 2: Cross-national media comparison

- *Frame:* Authority is constructed and contextual;
- *Kolb:* Reflective observation;
- *Anchor:* Agenda-setting and relationship-building; and
- *Assignment:* Learners compared coverage of a shared event across multiple national outlets, reflecting on sourcing, narrative construction and framing. They then applied agenda-setting principles to identify whose voices shaped public priorities and shared findings with diplomatic advisors.

Example 3: Multiplatform messaging design

- *Frame*: Information creation as a process and scholarship as conversation;
- *Kolb*: Abstract conceptualization to active experimentation;
- *Anchor*: Persuasive framing and information dissemination; and
- *Assignment*: Students synthesized readings and stakeholder input to design prototype messages (abstract conceptualization), then tested and refined these across social, print and community channels (active experimentation), ensuring clarity, cultural resonance and strategic reach.

Across all activities, learners cycle from experience to reflection, and from synthesis to action – enacting information diplomacy in ways that align conceptual mastery with civic purpose.

3.5 Synthesis table: integration of concept, pedagogy and civic strategy

To make these integrations explicit, [Table 4](#) maps select assignments across the three dimensions, showing how each activity fosters conceptual understanding, experiential practice and civic engagement.

4. Methods

The Information Diplomacy as Pedagogy model was developed, implemented and evaluated in two distinct instructional contexts: an empirical undergraduate course (Case 1) and a reflective graduate seminar (Case 2).

A qualitative, dual-case design underpins this study. Case 1 took place over Spring and Fall 2022 in a US-based undergraduate course on strategic mis/disinformation response, conducted in collaboration with diplomatic stakeholders from a federal government agency. Learning was assessed through open-ended surveys administered at the start, middle, and end of the course, as well as written reflections. The project received Purdue University Institutional Review Board approval (IRB-2022-59).

Case 2 occurred in Fall 2023 during a Finnish graduate seminar on infodemic management during a research exchange program. Here, no formal data collection was conducted; instead, instructor field notes provided a reflective basis for examining how the model functioned in a different cultural and institutional setting.

In Case 1, 34 undergraduates from a range of majors enrolled in the civic information literacy course. Case 2 brought together graduate students in an information studies course at a Finnish university. To maintain focus on pedagogical processes rather than individual characteristics, we rely on instructor reflections for the Finnish course.

Both cases were structured around three foundational elements. First, the ACRL Framework defined what students would learn by articulating six threshold concepts. Second, Kolb's experiential learning cycle prescribed how learning unfolded, guiding students through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Third, insights drawn from public diplomacy – operationalized in the classroom as the four anchors of information diplomacy (agenda-setting, persuasive framing, information dissemination and relationship-building) – clarified why the work mattered in civic, intercultural and contested information contexts.

Case 1 (Undergraduate course, USA)

In the undergraduate course, students began by interviewing diplomatic stakeholders to surface real-world information challenges and priorities. Building on those conversations, they conducted a literature review – engaging the ACRL frames authority is constructed and

Table 4. Synthesis table: Integration of concept, pedagogy and civic strategy

ACRL frame	Kolb's stage	Diplomacy anchor(s)	Activity example
Authority is constructed and contextual Information has value	Reflective observation Concrete experience	Agenda-setting and relationship-building Information dissemination	Comparing global media coverage and debriefing with stakeholders Running social listening audits and sharing "infodemic logs."
Scholarship as conversation	Abstract conceptualization Active experimentation	Persuasive framing Information dissemination	Drafting and iterating dual-audience policy briefs with stakeholder feedback Refining a prototype tool based on mid-project usability testing
Research as inquiry	Active experimentation	Agenda-setting and information dissemination	Designing and testing multilingual outreach materials
Information creation as a process	Reflective observation	Agenda-setting and relationship-building	Triangulating cross-platform sources and conducting stakeholder debriefs
Searching as strategic exploration			
Source(s): Table by author			

contextual and research as inquiry during concrete experience and reflective observation, with agenda-setting guiding their civic focus. Next, learners drafted a policy report that activated scholarship as conversation and information creation as a process through abstract conceptualization and active experimentation, underpinned by persuasive framing. For the third assignment, students built a social listening tool prototype to practice searching as strategic exploration and information has value in a hands-on, information-dissemination phase. Finally, they co-developed process guidance for diplomats – revisiting authority is constructed and contextual and information creation as a process, while relationship-building fostered iterative consultation with agency personnel.

Case 2 (Graduate course, Finland)

The Fall 2023 graduate seminar offered a condensed, seven-week implementation in an intercultural setting. The course was built around three foundational elements: the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (what students would learn), Kolb's experiential learning cycle (how learning would unfold) and the principles of public and information diplomacy (why the work mattered in contested and globally connected information environments). Within this structure, the World Health Organization's How to Build an Infodemic Insights Report in Six Steps served as a practical workflow to operationalize the experiential learning cycle in a compressed format. Each week, tackled one or more of the guide's steps:

- (1) Choose the question that infodemic management insights could help answer;
- (2) Identify and select data sources and develop an analysis plan for each data source;
- (3) Conduct an integrated analysis across data sources;
- (4) Develop strategies and recommendations;
- (5) Develop and infodemic insights report; and
- (6) Disseminate the infodemic insights report and track actions taken.

Instructor reflection followed a self-study of teacher education practices approach (LaBoskey, 2004), using the seminar as a structured opportunity to test how the model functioned when applied to local health narratives, in collaboration with Finnish hosts, and under compressed time constraints.

In Case 1, all data derived from students' written work, including open-ended survey prompts administered at the start, middle and end of the course, alongside reflective journals completed after each major assignment. For Case 2, systematic instructor field notes served as the sole source for examining how the model played out in settings outside the USA.

We applied an open-coding approach in NVivo to all qualitative materials. For Case 1, students' survey responses and reflections were coded for emergent themes tied to the four information diplomacy anchors and six ACRL frames; tracking theme prevalence across course milestones revealed shifts in how students conceptualized and applied information literacy concepts. In Case 2, instructor field notes were systematically reviewed against the model's tripartite framework to validate its adaptability, surface challenges in intercultural implementation and inform refinements to activity sequencing and stakeholder engagement strategies.

All coding was conducted by a single researcher who also designed and taught both courses. This dual role offered important strengths, including deep familiarity with course design, learning objectives and classroom dynamics, enabling nuanced interpretation of student work. However, it also presented limitations, such as potential confirmation bias and overemphasis on interpretations that aligned with intended outcomes. To address these risks,

coding decisions were documented in an audit trail, raw data were revisited to verify theme validity and illustrative quotes were selected to represent both supportive and critical perspectives.

The open-ended surveys administered at the start, midpoint and end of the undergraduate course (Case 1) reveal how students' attitudes, practices and collaborative behaviors evolved under Information Diplomacy as Pedagogy. We organize these findings around three phases: precourse baseline, mid-course engagement and end-of-course outcomes. We then add reflective insights from the graduate seminar (Case 2).

5. Results

Findings are presented by case, with Case 1 organized around the three phases of the undergraduate course and Case 2 distilled into thematic insights from the graduate seminar. In Case 1, open-ended surveys and reflections trace how students' motivations, participation patterns and conceptual understandings evolved from baseline to mid-course engagement and end-of-course outcomes. Each phase is interpreted through the integrated lens of the *what* (ACRL Framework), *how* (Kolb's experiential learning cycle) and *why* (information diplomacy).

Case 2 draws on instructor field notes to examine how the model was adapted to a different cultural and institutional setting, revealing both confirmatory and novel applications of the framework. Across both cases, the results illustrate how Information Diplomacy as Pedagogy can move learners from initial curiosity to applied civic action, while identifying opportunities to refine instructional sequencing and strengthen stakeholder engagement.

5.1 Pre-course baseline: motivations and verification practices

All 34 students completed a precourse survey probing their motivations and existing validation strategies.

Students' motivations clustered into three primary themes:

- (1) *Personal interest* ($n = 14$, 41 %): curiosity about disinformation's societal impact;
- (2) *Skill development* ($n = 12$, 35 %): hands-on practice in policy writing, data tools and research; and
- (3) *Civic imperative* ($n = 8$, 24 %): desire to counter misinformation's harms.

These motivations align with Kolb's concrete experience phase and the ACRL frame information has value, as learners arrived eager to interrogate information's role in public life through authentic, real-world contexts.

When asked about verification strategies, students reported multiple, overlapping tactics (total responses > 34):

- Cross-checking sources ($n = 22$);
- Evaluating credibility markers ($n = 16$);
- Consulting fact-checkers ($n = 14$);
- Assessing tone and bias ($n = 10$); and
- Tracing to original sources ($n = 9$).

These practices reflect early development of research as inquiry and searching as strategic exploration skills. Students also acknowledged challenges such as impulsive sharing,

emotional reactions and reliance on social proof. These baseline findings informed subsequent agenda-setting and reflective activities within the information diplomacy framework.

5.2 *Mid-course engagement: participation patterns and conceptual gains*

At the semester midpoint, 18 students reflected on their engagement, highlighting participation patterns, areas for improvement and emerging conceptual insights.

Participation patterns revealed comfort in small-group settings ($n = 14$) but hesitation in large-group discussions ($n = 8$). A subset ($n = 5$) described reflective note-taking as their primary contribution. These dynamics map to Kolb's reflective observation and the ACRL frame authority is constructed and contextual, illustrating how learners navigated social and institutional norms.

When asked to identify areas for improvement, students cited:

- increasing large-group contributions ($n = 9$);
- enhancing pre-class preparation ($n = 7$); and
- managing anxiety in full-class settings ($n = 5$).

Despite these challenges, students articulated emerging conceptual gains (responses > 18):

- Differentiating mis-, dis- and mal-information ($n = 9$);
- Recognizing global/systemic perspectives on mis/disinformation ($n = 6$);
- Understanding disinformation tactics (e.g. bot networks) ($n = 5$);
- Learning state department verification processes ($n = 3$); and
- Identifying psychological drivers like confirmation bias ($n = 3$).

These insights signal a transition into abstract conceptualization, underpinned by information has value and scholarship as a conversation. The emphasis on information diplomacy anchors at this stage was visible in students' growing ability to pair conceptual understanding with strategic civic applications.

5.3 *End-of-course outcomes: citizen diplomats in action*

In the final survey, students described stepping into collaborative "citizen diplomat" roles, demonstrating active experimentation across team projects.

Students reported collaborative leadership and team dynamics such as:

- playing to strengths ($n = 10$): assigning coding versus writing tasks;
- mediating divergent views ($n = 6$): synthesizing conflicting criteria into coherent plans; and
- cross-team liaison ($n = 4$): sharing data and design requirements.

These behaviors exemplify relationship-building as an information diplomacy anchor practice.

On applied civic deliverables, teams:

- ran social listening audits, producing and sharing infodemic logs (information dissemination and relationship-building); and
- drafted policy briefs, iterating via diplomatic feedback (persuasive framing and abstract conceptualization).

Notably, the team's step-by-step process for identifying mis/disinformation incidents was formally adopted by our diplomatic partners, showcasing real-world strategic impact.

Students' reflective narratives revealed increased ethical awareness and recognition of power dynamics in communication. By semester's end, they had moved from problem identification to solution testing – fully embodying the integrated *what–how–why* of Information Diplomacy as Pedagogy.

5.4 Self-study of teacher education practices reflective findings: graduate infodemic management seminar

The Fall 2023 graduate seminar in Finland offered a condensed, seven-week implementation of the Information Diplomacy as Pedagogy model in an intercultural setting. The course was anchored in the World Health Organization's How to Build an Infodemic Insights Report in Six Steps guide ([World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, 2023](#)). Each week – or pair of weeks – focused on one or more of the guide's steps, moving from identifying priority questions and collecting data to analyzing trends, synthesizing findings and developing actionable recommendations.

One early pedagogical challenge was sequencing the experiential learning cycle within the shortened schedule. The initial plan called for students to quickly identify and collaborate with a community partner; however, time constraints made this impractical for most participants. Instead, students researched potential partners, designed interventions they believed could work for the proposed audience and discussed possible refinements with guest speakers and peers. A few students proposed working with organizations they already knew, but most did not have an active partner. While this approach preserved the community-engaged intent of the model, it diverged from best practices in community-based participatory design, which emphasize stakeholder involvement from the earliest stages.

The seminar coincided with the launch of the World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Health in All Policies and Social Determinants of Health at Tampere University. This timing enabled participation in related events and facilitated informal networking with public health professionals. These opportunities strengthened the course's connection to current policy and practice, reinforcing the diplomacy anchors of agenda-setting and relationship-building.

In the absence of direct community partner feedback, structured peer critique sessions became a core strategy for refining public-facing outputs. These sessions focused on clarity, accessibility and cultural resonance as perceived within the cohort. While not a substitute for authentic community validation, this process provided a practical means to iteratively develop communication products within the course's time constraints and may serve as a preparatory step before stakeholder engagement.

Instructor reflections highlighted the value of placing structured reflection prompts between early data analysis and final product development. This sequencing bridged Kolb's reflective observation and abstract conceptualization stages, allowing students to articulate connections between their analytical work and broader civic communication goals before moving into full production.

By the end of the seminar, students had produced complete infodemic insights reports that could serve as starting points for future engagement with community partners. The experience demonstrated that, even in a brief, intensive format, the model could be adapted to a new cultural and institutional context while surfacing clear lessons for refining partnership development, sequencing and preparatory review processes.

6. Discussion

The findings from both instructional cases suggest that Information Diplomacy as Pedagogy successfully bridges conceptual frameworks, experiential sequencing and civic strategies to foster deep, applied information-literacy learning. Across the undergraduate and graduate contexts, students moved beyond academic skill acquisition to embody the role of “citizen diplomats,” leveraging critical inquiry, strategic communication and ethical reflection in real-world settings.

Our data show that anchoring assignments in specific ACRL frames – particularly *Information Has Value* and *Authority Is Constructed and Contextual* – helps learners translate abstract concepts into tangible civic actions. Precourse motivations and mid-course reflections indicated strong alignment with those frames, and end-of-course projects confirmed that students could apply them to analyze and counter misinformation. By mapping each frame to an active civic application, we addressed the common challenge of intangible threshold concepts and demonstrated how they can drive ethical, public-facing engagement.

Kolb’s experiential learning cycle provided a robust scaffold for transitioning students from exposure to expertise. In both cases, structured sequences such as immersive data exploration, guided reflection, conceptual synthesis and hands-on experimentation supported incremental skill development. Undergraduate learners progressed from concrete experience (e.g. social listening) to active experimentation (e.g. policy prototypes), while graduate students benefited from extended scaffolding in the reflective observation phase to navigate intercultural complexities. This confirms the value of iterative design in service-learning and suggests that explicit reflection prompts can enhance conceptual transfer, especially in higher-stakes, cross-cultural settings.

Embedding the information diplomacy anchors infused assignments with strategic intent and ethical grounding. Students reported that activities framed around real stakeholder needs felt more meaningful than abstract exercises, and several deliverables achieved real-world adoption. These outcomes underscore the pedagogical power of positioning learners as active communicators and trust-builders rather than passive analysts.

While the model proved adaptable, several limitations emerged. Large-group participation anxiety suggests a need for more inclusive discussion frameworks. Graduate reflections highlighted the importance of extending reflective observation scaffolds to support intercultural translation. Additionally, our reliance on open-ended surveys and instructor notes limits generalizability; future research should incorporate mixed-method instruments and longitudinal tracking to measure sustained civic engagement.

All coding and interpretation were conducted by a single researcher who also designed and taught the courses. This dual role provided deep contextual insight but also carried the risk of interpretive bias. In this study, the instructional contexts – US Diplomacy Lab collaborations, Fulbright exchange teaching and other highly selective international partnerships – made it logistically and structurally difficult to assemble a multi-researcher coding team or run parallel sections for comparison. These programs operate in niche, time-bounded environments with small cohorts, specialized access requirements and activities embedded in live diplomatic or intercultural initiatives, limiting opportunities for standard inter-rater reliability testing or replication within the same institutional setting.

One potential pathway forward is the development of sustainable, cross-institutional courses that share a core curriculum but adapt activities to local cultural, political and disciplinary contexts. Co-teaching across institutions would enable a built-in comparative

research design, distribute coding responsibilities and incorporate multiple intercultural perspectives on the same learning objectives. Over time, these collaborations could create shared data sets and a more robust evidence base for evaluating the model's scalability and transferability, while also making the research process less dependent on a single investigator.

Looking ahead, formal evaluation of learning outcomes – such as rubric-based assessments of deliverable quality or pre-/post-civic engagement scales – would strengthen evidence of efficacy. Where program size and structure permit, collaborative research teams or cross-site partnerships could distribute analytic responsibilities and enable comparative analysis across institutions. Exploring digital badging for specific diplomacy competencies or integrating peer assessment could further motivate reflective practice. Finally, adapting the model to virtual and community-based settings will test its resilience and applicability across diverse educational landscapes.

Together, these insights suggest that fusing conceptual, experiential and strategic elements can produce information-literate graduates prepared to operate with purpose in contested, globally interconnected information ecosystems – advancing both the scholarship and practice of critical information literacy in civic and intercultural contexts.

7. Conclusion

Information Diplomacy as Pedagogy addresses the urgent need for information literacy instruction that moves beyond procedural checklists to prepare students as strategic, ethical communicators in a global, interconnected information ecosystem. Integrating the conceptual depth of the ACRL Framework, the iterative structure of Kolb's experiential learning cycle and the strategic imperatives of information diplomacy, the model transforms threshold concepts into tangible practices that enable learners to analyze authority, trace information value, and craft persuasive, trust-building messages.

The dual-case implementation demonstrates the model's adaptability: undergraduates partnered with a federal agency to design policy briefs and develop social listening tools that directly informed diplomatic outreach, while graduate students in Finland co-created community-driven health communication campaigns through iterative, intercultural collaboration. Across both settings, students evolved from information consumers to "citizen diplomats," enacting their learning through deliverables with measurable civic impact.

Future applications should explore mixed-method evaluations, longitudinal studies of civic engagement and implementations in virtual or community-based learning environments. Cross-institutional collaborations – particularly those spanning national contexts – could expand the model's evidence base, distribute research responsibilities and further enrich intercultural perspectives. By equipping students with both the conceptual tools and the strategic mindset for democratic resilience, Information Diplomacy as Pedagogy offers a sustainable pathway for cultivating informed, empowered citizens capable of building trust and credibility in contested information environments.

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