Welcoming: The next generation of instruction librarians

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"So, how about we turn your final papers into an open access book?" I scrunched up my eyes as I threw this idea out on the first day of semester, hardly daring to see what the reactions of the class would be. Yet, as I paused to give the students time to think about their responses, the sound of surprised excitement that suddenly bubbled up made my eyes snap wide open. As I looked around the room I sensed a quiet thrill and realized that maybe, just maybe, this crazy idea might work out. In my daily work as a practitioner instruction librarian, I had always been a big fan of student publishing- it frustrated me to see how much effort, passion and expertise students brought to their final assignments, only to find these same essays languishing in a empty printer paper box in a professor's office a couple of weeks later. However, it was quite a different matter when it came to teaching my first class in a library program. Would the students of the newly formed LIS 4330 Library Instruction class at the University of Denver be as excited as I was about this project? Would students see peer review from real librarians as a way to get authentic and constructive criticism about their work, or would it be ridiculously terrifying for learners who had only been in school for a couple of semesters? What about the idea of publication- would students see this project as an opportunity to become more integrated into instruction librarian landscapes, or would it be interpreted as just one more task in what was already a very short quarter system? It was these questions, amongst others, that made me hesitate before I tentatively threw out the idea of a class publication one snowy night in January. Yet, as I swiftly came to realize, these students were more than capable of meeting these challenges as they threw themselves gamely and enthusiastically into *Got a minute? Instruction tune-up for time pressed librarians*.

Replacing their final paper, the students' brief for this assignment was to provide a short and pithy overview of an instruction, education, or information literacy topic that a busy librarian could make time for on a hectic day. Taking the shape of an essay, an annotated bibliography, a zine or a digital story, this paper then went through a double blind peer review process with practising librarians before being deposited as this Open Access class book in the school repository. In this respect, the assignment would meet many of the principles that I admired in publishing pedagogy; the opportunity to write for an authentic audience, an immersion in the complex practices and processes of knowledge construction, and the disruption of top-down power or control of what is seen to constitute "legitimate" knowledge (Miller, 2013).

More significantly for the purposes of this class though, this paper would also serve as a way to integrate students into instruction librarian communities of practice. As a loosely knit group, instruction librarians share a number of common interests, values and vocabularies- from Think-Pair-Share and "The Framework" to IL, CATs and the wide range of acronyms that we may bandy about unthinkingly. In other words, and drawing upon Lave and Wenger's sociocultural theories of learning (1991), instruction librarians form a specific social configuration with our own overt rules and perspectives, as well as more tacit ways of thinking about and, often, critiquing these experiences. The unique nature of these practices and understandings can be seen as what binds us together as instruction librarians, albeit loosely, informally and rarely

exclusively. Most importantly, though, and especially for the purposes of this Library Instruction class, these activities can also be seen as helping to form a living context where shared histories and ongoing negotiation produces instruction librarian experience and regulates instruction librarian competence, as well as providing a framework for engagement and development in the field (Wenger, 1999). In effect, when we reframe instruction librarian practices as shared and negotiated within a specific social environment, learning about instruction cannot be conceived as the acquisition of decontextualized or generic skills. Instead, this learning must be re-centered around the notion of participation in and engagement with authentic community activities (Rogoff, 2003), as well as the construction of identities or personal histories in relation to these group activities and practices (Wenger, 1999).

More expressly, these ideas spoke to the importance of designing an assignment that mirrored authentic and typical instruction librarian activities. Both publishing, as well as professional development or the need to keep up with educational developments are vitally important for many instruction librarians. This assignment would therefore engage students with common practices in the field, as well as providing a space to explore an area related to library instruction in far more depth, an issue that was particularly important given the varied nature of student interests and the limited time frame of the class.

At the same time, while engagement in these typical librarian activities is important, it does not automatically mean that ensuing student learning would transfer unproblematically from a school to a workplace setting. If learning is situated and contextual, then it is clear that it cannot necessarily be easily portable. In addition, the complexity of modern information and educational landscapes means that it is impossible to predict what challenges new professionals may encounter and, in fact, whether experts actually possess the knowledge that novices may need to develop for the future (Tuomi-Grohn, 2003). The notion of participation in a community's activities could not therefore, be simply structured as the unidirectional transfer of knowledge from expert to novice. Instead, the assignment would also have to be designed around the active interpretation and reconstruction of knowledge practices, or through a multi-directional, collaborative project of mutual interest where workplace and school can learn from each other (Konkola, Tuomi-Grohn, Lambert & Ludvigsen, 2007).

In effect, these ideas led to a restructuring of the assignment around a broader consideration of what students could bring to this assignment that instruction librarians could not. While students may not yet have the practical experience of instruction librarians, the nature of the instruction class in which they were enrolled meant that, unlike many practising instruction librarians, they did possess the time to reflect on and explore instruction issues in detail, as well as the benefit of fresh eyes and a wealth of experience from other fields. As a practising instruction librarian, it was very clear to me that we are often pressed for time, as well as hard pushed to keep up with all the changes that are taking place in this field. Student essays would thereby serve as a useful introduction or overview of a topic that a librarian may have been meaning to learn about, as well as functioning as a pointer for future reading. A publication assignment that matched these students' advantages of time with the librarians' need to keep up would thereby constitute a mutually beneficial activity where students are actively negotiating, contributing to and participating within established communities of practice, rather than merely processing its knowledge.

What to expect!

So what can you expect from this book, beyond 19 well crafted, well argued essays?! The breadth of topics in this book means that unlike many publications, this book is designed to be dipped into- while some topics may be very familiar to you, others may be completely new, or may serve as a refresher. Whatever your interest, students have taken a number of different approaches to explore a wide range of instruction topics.

Some students have helpfully rounded up research into ideas that you may not yet have got round to implementing in your instruction program- whether this is integrating the library into the Learning Management System (Cyndi Landis), creating an instructional Youtube channel (Saleh Aljalahmah) or visual literacy (Brittiny Tirapelle). Others have scoured the literature looking for and presenting best practices for technologies such as LibGuides (Meghan Damour) or for working with special populations such as transfer students (Chelsea Heinbach), English Language Learners (Joanna Stankiewicz) or Seniors (Renate Robey). Students have also uncovered a number of new instruction techniques and technologies that may be of interest, including the idea of visible learning (Meghan Ecklund) or new citation managers (Andrea Copland).

Another group of students set out to challenge conventional ways of thinking, whether this is about the educational theory of connectivism (Michael Bovee), the notion of scholarly authority in the classroom (Paul Worrell), or the need for asynchronous learning opportunities (Kate Wimer). Others have taken a deep dive into the connections between theory and practice, whether this is digital media and literacy programming (Cortnye Rusch), multimodal learning and Youtube (Joe Richard) or new and emerging trends in school libraries (Kerena Burns). In fact, topics that go beyond academic library issues are well represented, with a group of students focusing on approaches to teaching intellectual freedom (Rachel Reddick) or health literacy (Tiegan Ziegler) in public libraries, as well as the use of primary sources within school libraries (Rebekah Thurston). The instruction librarian herself is not forgotten either, with Kathryn Bodnar's paper rounding up advice about how to deal with burnout.

Whether you read the book from cover to cover, or dip in and out as your semester lets you, the papers that are gathered here represent both the students' exertions to write a paper that will be useful for busy practitioners as well as an important contribution from the next generation of instruction librarians. In her recent post on the ACRLog, Elizabeth Lieutenant (2016) highlights the need for practitioners to become more involved within LIS education, pointing out that "while it may be easy for practitioners to dismiss the relevance of LIS education to our profession's needs, it is those dismissals that contribute to LIS failing the future of our profession." It is in this spirit of mutual engagement and exchange that this book was written and I hope that the importance of continued reflection on and application of these ideas will become clear as you read through these LIS students' valuable contributions to the field.

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