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THE COLLEGE CONNECTION

Sequential Information Literacy Instruction (ILI): What, Why and How?

By Esther Grassian (UCLA), Angela Boyd (UCSB) and Pauline Manaka (UCI)

Guest columnists Esther Grassian, Angela Boyd and Pauline Manaka describe the LILi (Lifelong Information Literacy) Project and share results of a survey to determine information literacy instruction practices of different types of libraries in Southern California. This article complements the Fall 2007 College Connection, "Lifelong Information Literacy in Southern California" by Amy Wallace, which highlights K-12 information literacy outreach programs run by several California public university libraries. *-Abby Kasowitz-Scheer*

What?

Do you need an officially sanctioned group to tackle a major pressing problem? The quick answer is no. LILi (Lifelong Information Literary), a small informal grassroots group in Southern California is raising awareness and conducting studies related to the lack of sequential information literacy instruction in California.

Librarians involved in information literacy instruction (ILI) have lobbied for decades to have institutions and organizations take up the cause of information literacy. Thanks to their efforts, organizations like American Association of School Librarians (AASL), Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT) and Library Orientation Exchange (LOEX) have established information literacy competency standards and objectives, and offer extensive help in the form of publications, workshops, conference programs, newsletters, online courses, webinars, and much more.

All of this helps librarians enormously, and ultimately, their users become more powerful information researchers. But the question remains, does it go far enough?

Unfortunately, it does not. But why not? In many cases, information literacy instruction occurs in a silo. Institutions often expend effort vertically, throughout an institution or type of library. Very little is done to track sequential information literacy. With a growing number of exceptions, many do not look far beyond their own institutions to identify what their own users may need before they arrive or after they leave. In what sort of information literacy instruction have they already taken part? Which expected learning outcomes have they already achieved in other settings beyond one's own institution? What do they need in order to succeed, and what will they utilize after they leave a particular institution?

In California, Esther Grassian, serving as Information Literacy Outreach Coordinator for UCLA's undergraduate library (College Library), has held annual training sessions for a number of years for high school and community college librarians; the sessions were offered in order to leverage their help in preparing high school and transfer students for information researching at a university level. She wondered what these librarians were doing in the way of information literacy instruction, as she wanted to do the best job possible when working with them. So, she asked for librarian volunteers to help her look into this question and develop sequential ILI curricula for all levels. In 2004, Grassian formed a group that was later called "Lifelong Information Literacy," or LILi for short.

LILi is now an exciting, motivated and enthusiastic group of librarians from all types of libraries in Southern California: school, special, community college, college, university, and public libraries. Membership on the Advisory Board is currently by invitation, in order to have balanced representation among public and private college and university libraries, community colleges, public libraries, special libraries, and K-12 libraries. However, LILi meetings are open to all who wish to participate. The group meets quarterly in person at various institutions, by phone conference call, and in the 3D virtual world of Second Life. LILi is investigating information literacy instruction in all types of California libraries at all levels in order to identify gaps and overlaps and to

develop suggested models for lifelong sequential information literacy instruction.

Why?

For decades, librarians in school and academic libraries have been working independently to help their users learn or improve their information literacy/competency skills. These efforts increased greatly with the advent of computers in libraries in the 1980s, and have been expanding to public libraries and special libraries. Academic librarians and K-12 librarians/library media teachers (LMTs) more and more often collaborate and support one another's efforts these days, in many locations.

This is an excellent step forward, as it means that some of us are talking to each other about the whats, whys, hows and wherefores of information literacy instruction. However, it has taken academic and school libraries over 35 years to get to this point, as we have taught ourselves how to teach, helped each other by sharing what we have learned, established standards, conducted research studies, and raised consciousness worldwide regarding the need for information literacy.

How & When?

With no funding other than two small $500 grants, LILi Advisory Board members volunteered their time and energy to discuss and develop an exploratory ILI survey for California libraries, which was conducted in Fall 2006. The Fall 2006 LILi survey drew just 247 usable responses, out of an estimated total of over 8,000 California libraries. Although for the most part not generalizable, due to the relatively small number of responses, the results revealed that many of the respondents utilize or adapt IL standards. These results and informal discussion also revealed that libraries and librarians of all kinds are trying to help their user populations make effective, efficient and responsible use of information for work, education, and personal needs. This help takes many forms, including online and in-person homework help, classes, workshops, reference (all formats), tutorials, exercises, pathfinders, research guides, web sites, blogs, wikis, participation in 3D virtual worlds, and more.

Survey results indicated that some even teach or help their users in languages other than English, including Hindi, Chinese, Spanish, and even sign language.

Furthermore, many respondents teach common ILI topics (see Table 1 for examples). Respondents included 77 academic librarians; 113 K-12 librarians; and 40 public librarians (special libraries were not included due to insufficient data).

Table 1: Common Information Literacy Topics Taught in Academic, K-12 and Public Libraries

Information Literacy Topics	Academic Library Respondents	K-12 Library Respondents	Public Library Respondents
Selecting research tools appropriate to an information need	97%	80%	73%
Evaluating research tools (e.g., Google Scholar, licensed databases)	73%	35%	43%
Using periodical index databases	96%	41%	65%
Avoiding plagiarism	68%	78%	20%
Why, when and how to cite	73%	79%	25%

Survey results revealed, too, that librarians in all three types of libraries teach their users how to select appropriate research tools to meet their information needs. Is this repetition important, essential, or unavoidable? Should it be taught sequentially and how? The same questions apply to teaching use of periodical index databases, as well as plagiarism avoidance and citation, with all three types of libraries teaching these topics as well.

In addition, some either plan to or find themselves teaching other topics (see Table 2 for additional examples). Respondents to this question included 73 academic librarians; 111

K-12 librarians; and 38 public librarians. (Again, special libraries were not included due to insufficient data.)

Table 2: Additional Topics Taught in Academic, K-12 and Public Libraries

Additional Topics Taught or Planned	Academic Library Respondents	K-12 Library Respondents	Public Library Respondents
Describing/demonstrating how the web works	67%	61%	74%
Using basic computer functions	25%	51%	84%
Setting up and using email	16%	23%	76%
Using writing skills (e.g., summarizing, paraphrasing)	40%	61%	18%
Problem-solving and decision-making	48%	45%	26%

Some major questions remain unanswered. What are we repeating in our instruction; what needs to be repeated, and at what levels? On an even higher level, are we sharing our knowledge of teaching and learning, our teaching techniques, and materials? Do we know which instructional gaps need to be addressed? Are we working together to ensure that repetition of instruction is at appropriate levels for a given audience, utilizes higher level examples as instruction proceeds from basic to advanced, engages users, and is retained?

LILi members Esther Grassian, Catherine Haras and Billy Pashaie presented these and other findings from this preliminary survey at the 2007 LOEX Conference in San Diego. In September 2007, Esther Grassian and Marsha Schnirring offered a reprise of that conference presentation in Second Life. About 25 avatars from various parts of the world attended the Second Life presentation. A slidecast (slide show plus audio) of the presentation is available for free viewing, listening and downloading on slideshare.net: http://tinyurl.com/2l6ea9. This Second Life presentation exemplifies LILi members' interest in exploring new technologies for teaching and learning.

Next Steps

Despite much hard work, the response rate to this first survey was, admittedly, quite limited. However, LILi members are still very committed to fulfilling LILi's mission. In order to further this goal, the LILi Advisory Board was determined to conduct a survey whose results could be generalized, and to apply for a grant to support such a survey. The board developed and submitted an RFQ to three vendors to revise the 2006 survey, develop a valid sample of all types of libraries in Los Angeles, mount the survey, and analyze the results. The board selected Vital Research as its vendor, and has submitted a preliminary LSTA grant proposal to the California State Library for this purpose. If the preliminary proposal is accepted, LILi will be invited to submit a full proposal, with one-year funding to begin July 1, 2008 (if the full proposal is accepted). Once the survey has been developed and conducted, LILi hopes to progress in its mission, and at the same time, offer a model of how to examine information literacy instruction across all types of institutions, and develop sequential curricula to support their endeavors.

Conclusion

LILi's 2006 exploratory survey offered a tantalizing glimpse into information literacy instruction in some California libraries. In and of itself, the survey questions raised consciousness among the respondents about the significance of information literacy, and the fact that they were already contributing to its development among their user populations. It also alerted respondents to the need to assess their information literacy efforts, and the need to share and work together on our common goal: to help develop an information literate populace, able to locate and think critically about evidence regarding work, educational, and personal needs, in order to function as informed citizens of democratic societies.

Note: LILi continues to investigate information literacy instruction in order to develop

models for sequential lifelong information literacy instruction. We invite California librarians at all levels to consider and examine the possibilities for cooperative, collaborative sequential information literacy instruction for lifelong learning. For more information about LILi, please check the website: http://www.library.ucla.edu/college/lili/liliabout.htm.

About the Authors

Esther Grassian has been a librarian in the UCLA College Library since 1969. Her current title is information literacy librarian. She is also an adjunct lecturer in the Information Studies Department of the UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, where she teaches a graduate course she co-designed with Joan Kaplowitz, "Information Literacy Instruction: Theory & Practice." She developed and has taught two 1-unit undergraduate information literacy courses at UCLA, and taught many hundreds more as a guest lecturer, since the mid-1980s. Her publications include two co-authored books (with Joan Kaplowitz)-- Information Literacy Instruction: Theory & Practice (Neal-Schuman, 2001), and Learning to Lead and Manage Information Literacy Instruction (Neal-Schuman, 2005). She has also written various articles, book chapters & conference papers. She has been active in, made many presentations to, and chaired a number of local, regional and national library and information literacy organizations since the mid-1970s, including the ACRL Instruction Section, California Clearinghouse on Library Instruction, South (now called SCIL, a section of the California chapter of ACRL), and the statewide Librarians Association of the University of California. In addition to LILi, her current interests include immersive learning in virtual worlds, such as Second Life, where she works with the UCLA Library, UCLA students, faculty and staff, the Alliance Library System, ACRL, and the Digital Library Federation, among others.

Angela Boyd is the Psychology, International Organizations and News Librarian at University of California, Santa Barbara. She is involved in all aspects of public services at UCSB, including teaching information literacy. She is also an active member of a number of organizations including SCIL, ACRL-IS, and LIRT.

Pauline D. Manaka serves as research librarian for anthropology and sociology at the University of California, Irvine Libraries since 1989. As reference librarian, she teaches Writing 39C library instruction sessions, promoting information literacy across disciplines. Her liaison activities with anthropology and sociology include a focus on implementing disciplines specific information literary initiatives working with different professors. From 2002-03, Manaka served as one of the founding members of the ACRL/AASL K-16 IL Committee. She worked with Esther Grassian on the board for the Librarian Association of the University of California (LAUC) to gain UC endorsement of Information Literacy standards system wide. She is a member of the American Sociological Association Teaching and Learning Section, where she supported closer collaboration to promote faculty endorsement of information literacy standards within the professional societies.

Do you have ideas for future College Connection columns? Want to know more about the higher education component of S.O.S.? We are currently requesting contributions in the way of teaching ideas, lesson plans, and materials for the college level database. Contact Abby Kasowitz-Scheer at askasowi@syr.edu or 315-443-1943.