Teaching in a Tea House

Esther Grassian, Catherine Haras and Billy Pashaie

Introduction

Librarians at the University of Southern California are teaching information literacy (IL) in a Tea House, a popular wireless area on a campus of 33,000 students. Alameda County Library librarians instruct or help their users in Spanish, Chinese, Hindi and American Sign Language. National University archives VOIP (Voice Over IP) library sessions. All this and more, derived from an online fall 2006 LILi survey of information literacy instruction (ILI) in California, reveal the breadth and variety of library instruction taking place throughout the state.

LILi (Lifelong Information Literacy) is an informal group of librarians from a spectrum of California libraries (university, college, community college, school, government, public and special libraries). The group has come together to investigate IL definitions, standards and instruction across California libraries and intends to identify gaps and overlaps in curricula, as well as related issues for all types of California libraries. The goal is to facilitate discussion of who should be responsible for teaching various IL competencies, and at which levels, and to suggest what should be emphasized at various points throughout a sequenced, lifelong ILI curriculum. The LILi web site can be found at: http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/lili/index.htm.

Literature Review and Study Rationale

Librarians have worked hard for many decades to help their own communities become information literate. LILi members wondered if librarians in California were all teaching the same topics repeatedly and neglecting other topics. LILi hypothesized that the hard work libraries and librarians do in helping their users become information literate is generally not sequentially coordinated across pre-K and the K-16 pipeline with regard to public and school libraries, nor with libraries serving the workplace. A search of the literature reveals that pipeline and lifelong instruction for library and research skills is at best underdeveloped.

Searches in Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA), Library Literature and ERIC produced few results in general, and even less relevant results in particular. Most of the results that could have possible relevance were from Europe and Australia, but these results do not specifically address the U.S. educational pipeline and workplace environments with which LILi is concerned. Furthermore, many of the documents examined discuss ways to create and mark discrete assignments in order to have a positive impact on students' lifelong learning; or they discuss the way IL and lifelong learning concepts might be integrated into a particular discipline (e.g., global studies or history); or they consider different curriculum design approaches to providing IL.

The literature does acknowledge the need for cross-institutional collaboration. In *Blueprint for Collaboration*, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) recommend "programming on model collaborations related to information literacy at the local, state, and national level, encouraging partnerships between different types of libraries in a community" (AASL/ACRL, 2004). Appendix I to *Blueprint* provides several examples of collaborative partnerships between school, college, and university libraries.

Making the connection between school and public libraries, Bundy (2002) finds that one of the goals of these two institutions is "ensuring that students develop as information enabled learners," but that "funding, time, attitude and access seem to be the major

Grassian (*Information Literacy Outreach Coordinator*)
UCLA [Los Angeles, CA]
Haras (*Information Literacy Coordinator*)
California State University, Los Angeles [Los Angeles, CA]
Pashaie (*Information Competency Librarian*)
East Los Angeles College [Monterey Park, CA]

constraints on the cooperation" (p. 67). The IFLA/UNESCO *School Library Manifesto* states: "The school library is an essential partner in the local, regional and national library and information network" --interestingly, however, these influential bodies make no mention of sequential IL instruction (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2006). Conversely, a set of panelists at the 2006 Information Literacy Summit sponsored by the National Forum on Information Literacy called for "national information literacy standards in K-16; alignment of school-based standards with the skills needed in the workplace; partnerships between business and K-12; and increasing teachers' awareness of information literacy and their ability to teach it" (Perrault, 2006, p. 7). Appendix B of the same document states the purpose of the National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy Policy Council as "[reviewing] assessments and current standards documents, [deciding] on the number of assessment levels desirable and [providing] descriptions of each … [and determining] what should students know and be able to do at each level" (Perrault, 2006, p. 14). Similar to the 2006 Information Literacy Summit document, the Spellings Commission Report points out that, "States' K–12 graduation standards must be closely aligned with college and employer expectations, and states should also provide incentives for postsecondary institutions to work actively and collaboratively with K–12 schools to help underserved students improve college preparation and persistence" (Spellings, 2006, p.18).

Grimes writes about an attempt to "promote information literacy in a broader context … [providing] library instruction to over 800 students each semester within a multi-institutional environment." Students are required to utilize a community college library, a State Library, a local public library and local university libraries (Grimes, 1994, p. 715). Doiron also points to "the idea of a continuum of libraries" (Doiron, 2000, p. 22), and that "people need libraries at all points in their lives" (Doiron, 2000, p. 24). Mednick writes, "The idea of information literacy and its link to college students being lifelong learners is echoed in many of the University Library Mission Statements all over the world" (Mednick, 2002, p. 6). More recently, Matoush discusses outreach efforts to "begin a productive collaboration on information competence between [San Jose State University] and community college librarians" (Matoush, 2006, p. 162). Matoush also writes about an effort toward collaborative instruction with the local public library, although this plan was not fully realized due to time and budget restraints.

Judging from the literature, there have been several calls for, and attempts at, collaborative work among different types of libraries trying to provide lifelong information literacy instruction. These attempts, however, have rarely, if ever, taken place across all types of libraries: public, school, college, university, and special libraries. Furthermore, when attempts at collaboration were noted, budget, time, and personnel seem to have been major obstacles to success. This is a particular problem in California, a state which continues to rank last in the country in the number of library media teachers in K-12 libraries. According to the California Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics, only about 20 percent of California schools have a credentialed library media teacher on campus part time or more, with both a California teaching credential and a California library media teacher services credential (California Department of Education, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). An added problem is the lack of a state mandate for ILI. Finally, in many cases, there is no mention of formal standards, articulation, or assessment.

Methodology

Survey instrument

The LILi Advisory Board decided that a survey was a necessary first step to gather data on exactly what California libraries were teaching their users. The Board views this function broadly as the ability to identify, locate, evaluate and use information effectively and ethically, by offering classes and homework help, developing online tutorials, answering questions at reference desks, and more. The goal of the survey was to identify current practice, gaps and overlaps in IL curricula for all types of libraries in California. Advisory Board members are almost all reference and/or instruction practitioners in their libraries. Discussion revealed that instruction is labeled and conceived of differently depending upon the environment. For instance, public libraries offer "homework help" and classes, but do not label them "information literacy" or "information competency." Also, "teaching" was enlarged to encompass practices as diverse as reference desk assistance. Furthermore, instruction, even at a single institution, can differ radically from one branch to another in academic libraries or even from one department to another in public libraries (e.g., adult or children's services).

The Advisory Board had to make a number of complex decisions regarding the creation of a survey, including whether or not to produce four separate surveys (one for each type of library), how to mount a survey with little or no funding, and how to solicit responses from a broad cross-section of California libraries. In addition, the Board thought that exposure to the entire survey would be consciousness-raising for librarians in all types of libraries, some of whom may not have been exposed to the phrase "information literacy," nor thought that they were engaged in it. Given these facts, the Board decided to do one survey for all types of libraries, utilizing Zoomerang survey software (with permission of the UCLA Library), and to use Zoomerang's filtering and cross-tabulation features to tease out data regarding specific types of libraries. To the best of the Board's knowledge, this was the first effort to investigate information literacy instruction at a grassroots level across all types of libraries.

Note: Survey questions and total responses for each question can be found at: http://tinyurl.com/y85gx2.

Data collection

The LILi Chair was able to obtain two $500 mini-grants from the Librarians Association of the University of California, Los Angeles, to pay a question design expert to review the initial and the final surveys. Professor Nathan Carr, California State University, Fullerton reviewed the initial survey. It was mounted in spring 2006 as a pilot, and Board members made adjustments to it based on feedback from the pilot. Dr. Carr reviewed the survey once again, and a final version was mounted on October 19, 2006, with an extended closing date of December 15, 2006. Since the survey was unfunded, Board members solicited responses from all types of

California libraries through listservs and email distribution lists only. No paper surveys were sent through U.S. mail.

It is worth noting that it is difficult to determine the total number of libraries in California, particularly if one wishes to include the number of private school libraries or library media centers, the number of branches of academic libraries, and the number of departments in public libraries, each of which may provide vital data, as they serve users with discrete IL needs. There are 1,153 California public libraries, including main libraries, branches, stations (smaller than a branch), and mobile libraries (California State Library, 2006). There are 1,017 special libraries in California (*Directory of Special Libraries and Information Centers*, 2004). There are 346 academic libraries, not including branch libraries (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), and 6,340 public school library media centers. There are 4,147 private schools (eschoolsearch.com, 2007), however, the authors of this paper (members of the LILi Advisory Board) were unable to locate figures for private school libraries or library media centers. As a result, they were only able to identify a grand total of 8,856 California libraries, because they could not locate figures for the number of academic branch libraries, the number of public library departments and the number of private school libraries or library media centers.

Three hundred librarians completed the survey, a broad cross-section of respondents from many types of libraries, geographically distributed across the state. However, special libraries were poorly represented, with only three usable surveys, despite several attempts to solicit more responses. The low response rate of 300 was also further reduced by duplicate surveys from some of the same institutions, surveys that did not identify the name of the institution nor its location, and surveys where the first half and the second half were submitted as separate responses. After contacting institutions to find out which of the duplicate surveys to use, and after weeding out unusable surveys, the authors were left with 247 usable surveys.

Such a small number of usable surveys means that results cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, overall survey results revealed interesting data, and do tell a story, however anecdotal, reflecting the range of current IL practice statewide. Given the large amount of data collected per survey, and the low response rate, the authors decided to focus on analyzing data for questions that seemed most significant and of broadest interest.

Sample and Preliminary Findings

The breakdown of respondents (N=247) by overall type of library was as follows: Academic, 32%; K-12 School, 48%; Public, 16%; Special (business/corporate), 1%; and, Other 5%. With the exception of Special libraries, each type of library was relatively well represented. Overall, respondents' user populations ranged in size: 11% serve up to 500 users; 48% serve 501-5,000 users; 16% serve 5,001-20,000 users; 12% serve 20,001-50,000; and 11% serve over 50,000 users. The overwhelming majority of respondents (98%) reported having an operating library or library media center. Respondents teach many diverse user populations (see Appendix 1: Selected Data on Information Literacy Instruction to User Groups).

1. Instruction is occurring using professionally developed standards

Of the respondents surveyed, most (76%) offer some type of instruction to their users. Most (71%) of these libraries use professionally developed information literacy standards; some use more than one or adaptations. A majority (69%) has a definition of information literacy used to inform the institution's teaching. Importantly, most respondents (76%) reported offering some type of information literacy instruction to their users, and the main purpose of such instruction was academic; that is, instruction was directly related to school or course assignments (95%). High school students constituted the largest group getting instruction (44%), with college or university undergraduates the next largest (36%). In this sample, primarily librarians with an MLS or MLIS do the teaching (74%).

One-on-one drop-in or point of use instruction was the most frequently offered form of instruction, e.g., instruction at the reference desk (90%). Just over two-thirds of respondents have informational web pages (71%) and about the same percentage offer some form of group instruction (67%). Slightly less than two-thirds (62%) create bibliographies for their users. As for web technologies used for instruction, just one-fifth offer interactive tutorials (21%); few offer blogs (7%), rss feeds and all kinds of broadcasts (4% each), podcasts (2%), and wikis (2%).

Respondents report that most instruction takes place in library classrooms or library computer labs (76%); however, close to two-thirds takes place in the public area of the library (61%) and more than a third over the phone (36%).

2. Similar teaching efforts are infrequently assessed and unmandated

California libraries of all types do a lot of teaching, and use many diverse modes of instruction, including online tutorials, basic computer classes, for-credit courses and course-integrated instruction. However, when asked to describe *what* they were teaching, many types of libraries reported teaching similar (overlapping) topics, despite the fact that they have different user populations. For instance, 95% of respondents teach use of the library catalog, and most (89%) teach their users how to locate materials. Only a little more than one-third (36%) teach users how to evaluate periodical articles, while two-thirds describe or demonstrate how the web works (67%), and half teach basic computer functions (51%). Though many libraries now use blogs and wikis, few report using them for instruction (15%) and teaching how they work (18%).

Moreover, 43% of respondents do not formally assess their ILI. Instead, most rely on indirect assessment such as observation of body language (75%) and instructor feedback (63%). Few respondents (18%) indicated that instruction is mandatory or required.

Table 1

Questions 17 and 18: Types of Assessment Used to Measure Learning		
Type of Institution	**Formal Assessment**	**Informal Assessment**
Business/Corporation/Organization	2	3
Community College	22	27
California State University	14	17
Private School (all ranges of K-12)	11	20
Public School (all ranges of K-12)	48	84
Private College or University	16	20
Public Library	11	37
University of California	10	13
Other	6	7
TOTAL	140	228

Note: The numbers reported in Table 1 are raw data, not percentages.

3. Articulation beyond the institution is rare

The authors of this paper observed the relative rarity of outreach efforts beyond the institution, that is, collaborative efforts occurring among libraries. Just seven libraries reported sequencing their IL efforts with community partners outside the library or institution. Less than half of respondents with working definitions of IL (48%), include the "ability to engage in lifelong learning" as an element of their definition. Despite these sustained teaching efforts, only half of respondents reported 0-20% of their users as being fully information literate/competent, that is, able to engage with information at a high or very high level. Yet, since just 57% use formal assessment, these figures may be estimates at best. All of this leaves unanswered the question of whether or not assessment, mandates and articulation matter.

4. Information literacy achievements and obstacles to its success are common across libraries of all types

Question 16 asked: "What would you say are the greatest achievements of your information literacy/competency instruction, and the most important obstacles to its success?" Hand-coded responses (N=195) revealed commonalities across institutions. Highly valued achievements include: empowered users, establishment of course-integrated or sequenced instruction, collaboration with faculty, the fact that ILI is required or reaches most of an institution's users, and the community's awareness of or support for the program. Challenges to teaching include faculty resistance, staffing, time constraints, funding, outreach efforts, and a lack of formal mandate at the institution. A very small number noted the lack of IL or poor quality IL at a preceding (feeder) institution as an impediment to instruction. A final note: teaching achievements tended to be diverse, while challenges reported tended to be similar. Also, institutions reporting for-credit and course integrated instruction were more likely to cite multiple achievements and/or a robust program.

Question 16: Teaching achievements are diverse {N =195}	
Empowered users	52
Course integrated or sequenced instruction	48
Faculty collaboration: Faculty collaborate actively, collaborations with other campus entities outside the library	32
IL Instruction is required and/or reaching most users at the institution	31
Awareness: Community awareness/support of the value of the program	31
Instruction: Advanced IL (evaluation, citation formatting)	30
Instruction: Basic IL classes or basic computer classes	28
Assessment (including user evaluations)	25
Technology: Online modules, distance ed. classes and/or innovative use of technology	25
Instruction: Multiple class offerings on a variety of topics	23
Mandate, Standards, and/or a formal information literacy program	23
Flexible, adaptive service	19
Outreach: reaching and teaching to diverse populations	18
Instruction: One-on-one tutoring or in-depth reference	8
Staffing: quality teachers, professional development; sufficient staffing	8
Instruction: For-credit courses	7
Articulation: IL is sequenced with community partners outside the library or institution	7
Survival: Facility, equipment, and resources despite institutional hardship	5
Other	3

Question 16: Challenges to teaching are similar {N =195}	
Faculty: Faculty resistance to collaboration or lack of awareness	49
Staffing: Understaffed, no librarian, librarians uncommitted to teaching, or insufficiently trained staff	49
Time: Time constraints, schedule conflicts, tension between desk and classroom	48
Funding: Lack of classroom space, inadequate or poorly maintained resources	35
Mandate: No formal mandate or requirement; no state standards for IL at the K-12 level	34
Outreach: reaching and teaching to diverse populations a challenge	31
Users: User apathy, disinterest, overconfidence in skills, language barriers	25
Institutional support: Lack of vision and/or support from library- or administration, district, state	17
Demand: growing population of users	11
Articulation: Lack of/poor quality IL at preceding school	10
Technology: too many interface changes, keeping up with technology, IT problems	6
Other	4

Lessons Learned and Further Research

In spite of the low response rate to this first survey, LILi learned much that will provide guidance in developing and implementing an improved survey in the future.

- LILi needs to create four different surveys, one for each type of library, with some common questions that can be collated or correlated with libraries in other types of institutions/organizations.
- The next survey needs to focus on a smaller geographic area that can then be used as a model and applied statewide.
- The survey needs to ask directly about sequential ILI, who is working with whom, on what, and in which ways.
- LILi needs to seek funding to pay for a professional to help create a more focused survey with fewer questions, identify a targeted sample to survey, and then distribute, tabulate and do a statistical analysis of the survey results.
- In order to apply for a grant to support this investigation further, LILi needs to affiliate with a formal organization or institution.

LILi members see this particular survey as a fruitful first step toward investigating sequential lifelong ILI, identifying gaps and overlaps, and making curricular suggestions to address IL needs. Ultimately, LILi hopes this investigation will help California libraries, and perhaps others, work together to develop an information literate populace in a systematic, coordinated, and supportive fashion.

References

American Association of School Librarians/Association of College of Research Libraries Task Force on the Educational Role of Libraries, (2004). *Blueprint for Collaboration*. Retrieved April 7, 2007, Web site: http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/whitepapers/acrlaaslblueprint.htm

Bundy, A. (2002). Essential connections: School and public libraries for lifelong learning. *Australian Library Journal*, *51*(1), 47-70. Retrieved April 8, 2007, from LISA: Library and Information Science Abstracts database.

California Department of Education, (2005). *Statistics about California school libraries*. Retrieved April 18, 2007, Web site: http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/lb/libstats.asp

California State Library, (2006). *California library statistics 2006*. Retrieved April 18, 2007, from: http://www.library.ca.gov/assets/acrobat/StatsPub06.pdf

Directory of special libraries and information centers. (2004). Detroit, Mich.: Gale Research Co.

Doiron, R. (2000). Lifelong libraries for lifelong learning. *Feliciter*, *46*(1), 20-24. Retrieved April 8, 2007, from LISA: Library and Information Science Abstracts database.

eschoolsearch.com. (2007). Retrieved April 25, 2007, Web site: http://www.eschoolsearch.com/

Grimes, D. J. (1994). Library instruction the cooperative way. *College and Research Libraries News*, *55*(11), 715-717. Retrieved April 8, 2007, from LISA: Library and Information Science Abstracts database.

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, (2006). *From IFLA/UNESCO school library manifesto*. Retrieved April 11, 2007, from IFLANET Web site: http://www.ifla.org/VII/s11/pubs/manifest.htm

Matoush, T. L. (2006). New forms of information literacy. *Reference Services Review*, *34*(1), 156-163. Retrieved April 8, 2007, from LISA: Library and Information Science Abstracts database.

Mednick, M. (2002). *Information literacy: The new challenge*. Retrieved April 14, 2007, from ERIC database.

National Center for Education Statistics (2002). *2002-2003 CBEDS report and digest of education statistics and tables and figures*. Retrieved April 17, 2007, Web site: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d02/dt080.asp

Perrault, Anne Marie. (2006). *American competitiveness in the Internet age report*. Retrieved April 11, 2007, from http://www.infolit.org/meetings/InfoLitSummit16Oct2007B.pdf

Spellings, Margaret. (2006). *A test of leadership: Charting the future of U.S. higher education*. Retrieved April 11, 2007, from http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/final-report.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Services. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). *Academic Libraries Survey*. (2004). Retrieved April 18, 2007, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004313.pdf