

Step by step teaching: creating learning outcomes

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•Who teaches instruction sessions at your library? How do they teach? Do they follow a particular model? This is how the Gelman Library at George Washington University worked towards Step By Step Teaching.

At Gelman, the librarians of Education and Instruction Group (EIG) teach the majority of instruction sessions while reference librarians occasionally teach specific discipline related classes in fields such as Business, Science, and Engineering. The department recently moved to a working group model with four main groups that do reference on a regular basis and other tasks that may or may not include instruction. We have 15 reference librarians and half of them are members of EIG.

Within the library there was a consensus that EIG librarians were progressive in their teaching, incorporating active learning and group exercises, and that the department as a whole would benefit from learning these techniques. To share experience and knowledge about the process of teaching, EIG librarians have conducted a series of teaching workshops for the rest of the Reference and Instruction Department.

In early 2004, EIG librarians discussed the idea at a weekly meeting and suggested taking a systematic approach, where one workshop would build upon the next. During the initial group discussion, EIG librarians suggested planning the sessions to last at least 90 minutes to allow for hands-on exploration, focus on the target audience of reference librarians and library assistants who teach, and consider how the workshops will be perceived by our audience. It was agreed that a team of two librarians would lead each workshop and in planning should make sure to incorporate some form of hands-on practice.

The basis for the workshop series was the five questions for instructional design as presented at the 1999 and 2002 Institute for Information Literacy Immersion Program, which was attended by the Instruction Coordinator. The questions are:

- What do you want the student to be able to do?

(Outcome)

- What does the student need to know in order to do this well? (Curriculum)
- What activity will facilitate the learning? (Pedagogy)
- How will the student demonstrate the learning? (Assessment)

How will I know the student has done this well? (Criteria)

The first workshop in the series covered the topic of learning outcomes. As a whole, the EIG librarians adhere to the idea that all classes should have clear outcomes. However, we had to make a connection with the larger department on the usefulness of learning outcomes and to emphasize that learning outcomes are valuable not only for formal classroom instruction, but also for interactions at the Reference Desk, one-on-one Research Assistance Appointments, and training within the department.

The first workshop on creating good learning outcomes was held in July 2004. All the workshops were held during the regular weekly reference department meeting time. As this was the first in the series, we covered the goals for all of the workshops as well as for this particular workshop.

The goals for the workshop series were:

- By the end of the workshop series librarians will have a better understanding of the instructional design process and how it is used to assist with creating instruction sessions.

By the end of the workshop series librarians will have the tools to incorporate at least one new idea into their interactions with patrons in order to assist them with the learning process.

The goals for the Learning Outcomes workshop were:

- By the end of this session, librarians will be able to identify the main ideas/goals of the instruction session in order to draft learning outcomes.

By the end of this session, librarians will be able to construct at least one learning outcome related to an assignment/syllabus in order to focus their instruction into measurable parts/goals.

We used a brief PowerPoint to cover what goes into creating good learning outcomes:

- o Action oriented language
- o Measurable results
- o Transferable skills
- o Clear to the student
- o Use the phrase “in order to”

Reflective of Bloom’s taxonomy

We divided the participants into small groups of four in order to facilitate discussion and collaboration and assigned EIG librarians to sit at each group table. We designed exercises for each group that required drafting a learning outcome for a mock library instruction session based on real assignments collected by EIG librarians. These were assignments that EIG librarians had used to design instruction sessions in previous semesters.

We distributed a handout of Bloom’s taxonomy covering the six levels of learning as well as verbs associated with each level in order to assist participants in drafting their own learning outcomes as part of the group exercises.

Each group was given a sample assignment with these instructions:

Group Activity:

Read the assignment below. List what should be covered in a library instruction class in order for the students to complete the assignment. Off of the list, what are the three most important things to be covered in the instruction? Using the flipchart, write at least one learning outcome based on your discussion

During the modeling exercise, EIG members stationed at each table facilitated discussion by encouraging each group to consider: What skills the students need to learn in order to complete the assignment? What can realistically be covered in a 75-minute instruction session? And the EIG members assisted the group with creating a learning outcome.

A timeline provided additional information that could be useful for refining the learning outcomes, such as; the date of the instruction session, due date for the rough draft or

bibliography and the due date for the final assignment. This was followed by a brief 1-2 paragraph description of the assignment.

During the design of the workshop, we did a trial run for EIG members and incorporated their recommendations into the final version; with their assistance we were able to focus each assignment to help lead the groups toward a particular learning outcome. An EIG member was stationed at each table to help facilitate discussion but we wanted them to refrain from leading the debate in order to encourage reference librarian’s comments first. There was lively discussion in all of the groups and each table was able to draft a learning outcome based on the assignments we distributed.

Although EIG members thought the workshop series went well, it was insightful for us to gather comments from the reference librarians who participated.

Debbie Bezanson, Electronic Resources librarian said: “Although I have not conducted any instruction since the workshop, I have found the information I learned about creating learning outcomes useful in preparing and organizing myself for one-on-one research assistance appointments with patrons. Instead of assisting the patron with a ‘here is the information you requested’ approach, I can plan the meeting along a set of skills rather than finding a specific source of information.”

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Reference and Collection Development librarian said: “Since the workshop I have concentrated on major research concepts that would be most useful to students across the board. The workshop helped confirm the need to focus on fewer sources and customize handouts.”

Even though the original intent of the workshop was to teach reference librarians and library assistants how to construct learning outcomes in order to focus their instruction, we were delighted to see other useful applications for this new set of skills.

We built upon this first workshop by offering two subsequent ones, the second on tasks and activities, and third workshop on collaborative learning. Please look for the next article in this series in the subsequent LOEX Quarterly.