LOEX 2014 Conference Report: Grand Rapids, MI

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The 42nd annual LOEX conference was held May 8-10, 2014 in Grand Rapids on the west side of the Mitten State, Michigan. Close to 375 librarians were in attendance to learn more about *The Art of Information Literacy*. After a bevy of activities on Thursday, including an enlightening pre-conference on using logic models, attendees enjoyed Friday and Saturday morning plenary sessions and then selected from a palette of 62 breakout sessions. Some highlights:

The New Science of Learning: How to Learn in Harmony with Your Brain

The first plenary speaker, Terry Doyle, stirred up the audience members with his provoking, informative and motivational speech. Doyle, a Professor of Reading for the past 37 years at Ferris State University, also spent more than 10 years' as the Senior Instructor for Faculty Development and Coordinator of Ferris' Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning.

Doyle started his talk with the challenge that educators are all facing: How do students learn? He pointed that we must first understand how peoples' brains take in, process, and retrieve information, and then we can design workable ways to teach our students. The human brain weighs only three pounds, but contains 86 billion neurons that can make up to one quadrillion synaptic connections. New learning takes place when new connections are made, which is directed by what people pay attention to. The smarter students will make more efficient connections and skip things that are unimportant. Students with lots of knowledge find learning easier because they already have more connections and it is easier to make new connections among them. Dr. Doyle also clarified some popular myths about the human brain: 1) People should not be separated by right or left brain thinking; 2) We should not use different learning styles, like visual, auditory or kinesthetic, to justify student learning; and 3) Multitasking decreases mental resources needed for new learning and shortens the attention span.

Doyle also discussed how students increasingly need post-secondary education for jobs and will face competitors from around the world for those jobs. The current generation of students will not only live longer but work longer—possibly into their 70s or 80s, some in jobs that currently do not exist; therefore, they need to be lifelong learners in order to survive. To illustrate how this learning will occur, Dr. Doyle referred to this quotation: "Learning is the ability to use information after significant periods of disuse and it is the ability to use the information to solve problems that arise in a context different (if only slightly) from the context in which the information was originally taught" (Bjork, 1994).

A useful dictum to keep in mind is that "it is the one who does the work who does the learning." To get the brain ready to do that work and function effectively, Doyle presented five important elements:

- Hydration: Water is essential for optimal performance. One's hydration level influences one's mood, energy level, the ability to think clearly, and short- and long-term memories.
- Diet: The brain requires about 22 times as much energy as our muscles do. The contents and timing of meals may need to be coordinated to be efficient. Glucose enhances learning and memory, and a diet high in saturated fat reduces the brain's learning ability.
- Sleep: Toxins from our brain are flushed out and memories are made during sleep. Enough sleep helps retain information and sleep directly after learning something new is beneficial for memory. Research indicates that a 20-30 minute nap increases creativity.
- Exercise: Exercise is the single most important thing a person can do to improve his learning, which can help with focus, attention, motivation, mood, and stress. Exercises stimulate the production of BDNF protein, "the Miracle Grow for the brain," by enhancing the wiring of neurons and improving brain health and memory.
- Oxygen: Oxygen is essential for brain function. Physical activities are reliable ways to increase blood flow and, hence, oxygen to the brain.

Doyle emphasized that educators must follow where the research leads us even if it makes us uncomfortable or results in major changes in our teaching practices.

More info can be found from his website "Learner Centered Teaching": http://learnercenteredteaching.wordpress.com/about/

Expanding Our Boundaries: Information Competency Writ Large

Saturday morning's speaker Lee Van Orsdel, Dean of University Libraries at Grand Valley State University, challenged those in attendance to reach out, listen to the campus community's needs, and take strategic risks in her talk on expanding boundaries.

An "Entrepreneurial Model" of Service

When Van Orsdel took her current position in 2005 she implemented an "entrepreneurial model" of service. This model encouraged liaison librarians to actively seek out and identify opportunities for outreach and support with students, faculty and other campus organizations. These outreach efforts, defined by persistent, positive engagement and a not afraid to fail attitude, helped lead the Libraries toward integrating the Libraries' Information Literacy Core Competencies into the curriculum. Through this service model, Van Orsdel noted, the

Libraries was able to reshape its role on campus, which helped lead to a new library building in 2013.

Researching Student Behavior

Van Orsdel wanted a building designed to meet the needs of the campus community, especially the personal, social and academic needs of the students. The Libraries conducted its own research in order to design the new library and model its services after student behavior. The research, which included hundreds of hours of time-lapse video, unveiled the rhythms of an ordinary school day. They found students typically worked and studied alone during normal class hours, but most worked and collaborated in groups during the afternoon and evening hours. In other words, students created their own learning environments, and GVSU aimed to recreate those opportunities in the new building.

Learning Spaces

Research has shown that up to 90% of student learning happens outside the classroom, so the new library has been outfitted with tools students need to manage their own learning. While there are quiet spaces and lounge chairs for the times of day students want to work alone, there is an emphasis on flexibility, with mobile furniture and many spaces inviting collaboration, such as 10'x10' rooms where the walls are covered with floor-to-ceiling whiteboards and presentation practice rooms.

The Knowledge Market

The defining piece of the new building is the Knowledge Market. Meant to make the main floor inviting and lower the threshold for students to "engage more deeply with expert help", it also incorporates yet another active learning space into the library. Designed to mimic collaboration in the workplace, trained student consultants offer peer-to-peer teaching, an interaction proven to be important in the learning process. Assessing the value of the Knowledge Market has been made easier through a software program that allows students to set up their own appointments, tracks which classes and assignments the sessions cover, and students and consultants can also provide their own assessment of the session.

Learning to Give Up Ownership

Perhaps the most important takeaway Van Orsdel has observed since the new library opened a year ago, is that 21st century libraries need to let students take ownership of the building. Almost all signage was taken out so students wouldn't feel like they were guests in the library's space and could feel free to use most spaces in any way that fits their learning needs (as there is no sign "defining" the space). A perfect example of students taking ownership is the atrium furniture. Initially stationed around tables or in neat rows, students would move the seats to the wall of windows facing campus. Each day, the chairs would be put back in their original positions only to return to the windows. Eventually, the Library let the chairs remain where they were, only moving them to their original positions at the end of the semester to take inventory.

Van Orsdel admits the new library is nice, but it needs to make an impact on they way students perform. Early data shows a 10% bump in freshman retention rates when a librarian is actively involved in the class and the Knowledge Market is seen as a leader in change on campus. In the end, the library enhances the student learning experience by recognizing that student learning crosses boundaries and doesn't all happen in the classroom. Van Orsdel's talk invited those in attendance to examine if they, and their home libraries, are flexible enough to cross those same boundaries to meet the personal, social and academic needs of their students.

Breakout Sessions

When your provost asks you to expand your 3-sections-a-year Library 101 class to also annually handle 2000 transfer students to get their core-required IL instruction, but doesn't agree to expand your budget/space/faculty staffing enough to do it face-to-face (as you've done it before), you need to get creative. Karen Brown and Sharon Verba discussed how the University of South Carolina library handled this in their session, "Mass Producing a Masterpiece: Designing a Required One Credit, Distributed Learning Information Literacy Course."

The presenters found "answers in the problems": by transferring a face-to-face course into an online distributed one-credit course with set content, facilitated instruction, and adjunct grading, they needed less budget and instructor time than they would have face-to-face. Now the library can offer up to 80 sections per year with 25 students per section. They utilized Backward Design and other planning to best handle the various issues that they faced with the online course development: 1) Revising course contents and curriculum—identifying the course learning outcomes and evolving online instruction expectations; 2) Course assessment—how to determine acceptable evidence to evaluate online students with quizzes, assignments, and rubrics; 3) Course management—the process of working with the university's Registrar and other academic units; 4) Teaching force—how to get support from administration and recruit enough instructors (total of 40-50) to "teach" each section with planned learning experiences; 5) Technical support—how to get course delivery support and cross training. The information presented in this session was applicable to any academic institution willing to do similar planning and effort to assemble the pieces of the entire "frame" for which the content (the "masterpiece") can shine. The students can learn and produce work that they will value throughout their time at their new university.

With assessment continuing to increase in importance for all of higher education, how can libraries make sure they are an integral and valued part of this effort? The session "Jump into the Game: How Libraries Can Adapt to Institutional Assessment Plans," presented by Jessica Crossfield McIntosh, Rares Piloiu and Amy Parsons from Otterbein University discussed their library's current strategies in this area. At Otterbein, the university had established learning goals, as part of its accredi-

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tation process, for its students to be "Knowledgeable, Multiliterate, Engaged, Responsible, and Inquisitive" (KMERI). The library analyzed the detail behind those five goals and decided to "take over" the "M", redesign its goals for the Information Literacy program to cover those elements expected for each year in school (freshmen through senior), and to align information literacy assessment with institutional assessment.

To improve library services and demonstrate their values to the university, the presenters offered practical strategies for developing partnerships with various university communities, such as getting involved at the top administrative level, helping faculty design and develop assessment exercises that could provide evidence students were meeting department-specific outcomes, and selling what librarians can do for them. A collaboration with a nursing course was used as an example to demonstrate how librarians use practical examples, handouts, grading rubrics and visual demonstrations in classroom to make creative interpretation of institutional assessment that was useful for the students, faculty and the librarians.

On Friday afternoon, Linda Miles (Yeshiva University), Jennifer Poggiali (Lehman College, SUNY) and Phil Poggiali (Pace University) conducted an interactive workshop, "Broadening Your Palette: Adding Dimension to Lesson Plans Using a Range of Technologies." The session began with the presenters asking participants to imagine their students interacting with "high tech" (computer-centered) and "low tech" (non-digital) activities: what differences in the students' behavior did they expect to see and how would that affect the lesson? The attendees then formed small groups to create two lesson plans for the same learning objectives, one using "high tech" and the other using "low tech" tools. At the end of the exercise, the groups examined the translation process and found it proved more difficult when starting with a "high tech" lesson and transferring it to a "low tech" format than the reverse.

One takeaway from the activity highlighted that what works in one format doesn't always work in another. Also, students and instructors need more knowledge of "high tech" than "low tech" resources to make the lesson a success, which may pose barriers or argue for the creation of hybrid activities. Many in attendance agreed "low tech" resources can seem just as novel and engaging to their students as activities designed around "high tech." This observation highlighted the presenters' opening remarks that it doesn't really matter whether or not library instruction uses "high tech" or "low tech" resources because those are just the details of lesson planning; the cognitive and conceptual work underpinning the lesson process stays the same.

Catherine Fraser Riehle's session "Collaborators in Course Design: A Librarian and Publisher at the Intersection of Information Literacy and Scholarly Communication," gave attendees a prime example of engaging undergraduate students in the scholarly communications process. With the advent of the interdisciplinary Purdue University Honors College in the fall of 2013, the Libraries had a big opportunity to go further in its support of scholarly communication. Matching the College's interdisciplinary nature, a new "Publishing Bootcamp" course was created in partnership with multiple areas of the university in order to "expose students to the world of scholarly publishing, from practical issues to philosophical challenges."

The learning outcomes for the project-based course were for students to be able to engage in knowledgeable discussions about the publishing business, identify careers in publishing, make informed decisions as an author about how to communicate their work, and to review, edit and design journal and book manuscripts. To enable this, the hands-on course offered workshops by the University Press staff covering copyediting, marketing and Adobe InDesign; in-class discussions on Open Access led by a Scholarly Repository specialist; and other class sessions where staff from the University Archives and the Copyright Office touched on digital rights management and authors' rights, respectively. Riehle wanted students to be assessed on "authentic deliverables", based on the application of the knowledge they had gained throughout the course. This resulted in the publication of a print and digital book, for which students had each edited a chapter and helped design. Students were pleasantly surprised when, on their fieldtrip to BookMasters, Inc. in Ohio, they were able to pick up copies of their book "hot off the presses."

A description of the book, "Little Else than a Memory: Purdue Students Search for the Class of 1904" can be viewed at http://goo.gl/m71VQ9.

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For more information about the conference, and the PowerPoints and handouts for many of the sessions, including from all the sessions listed in this article, visit the website at http://www.loexconference.org/2014/sessions.html