The Quarterly Interview: Mary Broussard

Lycoming College
-Edited Transcript-

LOEX: *Where do you work? What is your job title and main responsibilities? How long have you been there?*

Broussard: I have been at Lycoming College in Williamsport, Pennsylvania for nine years. My full job title is Associate Professor and Instructional Services Librarian, Coordinator of Reference and Web Services. I do a lot of information literacy instruction, coordinate reference services and collections, and am responsible for the library website including online tutorials.

What books or articles have influenced you?

1) *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy* by James Paul Gee (2007). This book makes a strong argument that real learning can and should be fun at all ages. I love to learn and am always looking for ways to make learning fun and engaging for my students.

2) *"Formative Assessment: Transforming Information Literacy Instruction"* in *Reference Services Review, 39*(1), 24-41 by Dunaway & Orblych (2011). This is one of the very few texts I found on applying formative assessment to libraries. Because I couldn't find more texts like this one, I found some knowledgeable colleagues and wrote a book expanding on what I learned from this article.

3) *Reading as Rhetorical Invention* by Douglas Brent (1992). My current research interest involves looking at how information literacy fits in the broader context of writing from sources. This book opened my eyes to how much there is to know about reading, such as how reading is a highly social and active occupation, how rich text evaluation can be, and how we make meaning from texts by connecting new information to previous knowledge, values, and beliefs.

You have done an extensive amount of research into formative assessment and have produced a book, articles, and many presentations on the subject. What is formative assessment and why is it so important?

Formative assessments are 'in-the-process-of-learning' assessments. They provide educators with evidence of student learning that educators can react too immediately to maximize that learning. A frequently cited study in *Phi Delta Kappan* by Black and Wiliam found that formative assessment is the single most effective pedagogical practice for increasing student learning. Being able to *immediately* react to quickly collected assessment data is particularly important for librarians who often teach information literacy in one-shot sessions. A librarian can do the whole assessment loop multiple times within a single hour. Additionally, librarians do not need high levels of collaboration with teaching faculty to get started, but they can use the evidence gathered to build more meaningful collaborative relationships with other educators.

What are the key elements of a successful formative assessment tool/instrument?

A formative assessment instrument should:

- Enable assessment to happen while student learning is taking place rather than when it has ended.
- Be simultaneously an assessment and a learning object.
- Incorporate timely and meaningful feedback.
- Come with a flexible plan for what the educator will change based on the results.
- Take place in a safe learning environment where students are graded for effort rather than success.

How do you see formative assessment working with the new Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education?

The *Framework* and all of the conversations it has inspired, asks librarians to teach information literacy differently. By differently, I mean the *what*, the *how*, and the *why*. We need both short-term and long-term evidence of what pedagogies work and how students are interpreting and learning the Frames. To simply collect evidence at the *end* of a one-shot session or when a paper is turned in misses an opportunity to improve the learning of the students who were just assessed.

As we go through this philosophical change in how we teach information literacy, we need little assessments that allow us to adapt on the spot to evidence of student learning. Those and other assessments can be further analyzed collectively, when we have more time to reflect on them, to inform how we plan future lessons. I also hope people will share their *Framework*-related formative assessment activities within departments and across institutions so that we can support each other in figuring out the *Framework* and making any necessary revisions before it officially replaces the *Standards*.

What kinds of technologies do you use in your practice of formative assessment?

Generally, I see technology as being particularly useful for facilitating formative assessment in large classes, and at Lycoming College, most of our classes are small. However,

I do occasionally use TurningPoint clickers (https://www.turningtechnologies.com/response-solutions) as formative assessment tools. I ask trivia questions (sometimes review, sometimes new information), and facilitate a class discussion only when a significant portion of the class selects an incorrect answer. Sometimes I simply ask students to guess something they couldn't possibly know, such as a statistic, just to stress that such information can illuminate assumptions and be important for making an argument. I also use Imagine Easy Academy (http://www.imagineeasy.com/classroom), an interactive tutorial platform, for flipped learning. It assesses students' background knowledge and periodically tests their comprehension as they work through the content. I use the data collected to plan my face-to-face lessons with these students. For example, more than half of the students in a freshman composition course thought the ISBN is what helps someone find the physical book on the shelf, which led me to spend more time talking about call numbers. The pre- and post-test results showed significant improvement of foundational knowledge and students overwhelmingly liked the platform. I am also hoping at some point to have an instructional opportunity that takes advantage of the formative assessment potential within our citation management system to support students' research during the inquiry process.

You are also very involved in gaming in instruction. What is the best gaming software? Is there something for beginners?

Unfortunately, the short answer is "no." Web development technologies are changing and I have yet to find a good replacement for Adobe Flash, the program I had been building games in. I have been greatly inspired and intimidated by the work of Brian Mayer, who was recently named one of *Library Journal's* Movers and Shakers. He comes at game-based-learning from a design perspective and he actually plays a lot of games, unlike most of us who are designing library games. I was blown away by his board game *Freedom* (https://academygames.com/games/freedom), which showed me how incredibly sophisticated both the fun and the learning could be in an analog game. I am convinced that the best path for creative and effective educational game design is through homemade analog (non-digital) games rather than building up librarians' computer programming skills. However, I have found the scholarly literature and social media do not provide the same support for analog educational games as digital, so I've been looking for a way to overcome my current barriers in regards to further game design.

How have you used gaming in your instruction? Can gaming be used with formative assessment?

I created Goblin Threat (http://www.lycoming.edu/library/instruction/tutorials/plagiarismGame.aspx), an entirely digital game to teach basic plagiarism facts. I also created or co-created several location-based games including a library orientation and a campus history game, each of which required some type of proof that students had physically visited the required location. In *Secret Agents in the Library* (http://www.lycoming.edu/library/instruction/tutorials/secretagent.aspx), I combined digital activities with a physical exploration of the library collections for a freshman composition class. In addition to these educational games, I have used several trivia games in outreach events including Harry Potter Night and Banned Books Week. With the exception of the trivia games, all of my games have all included formative assessment. Good games, whether they are educational or not, are full of formative assessment; they react to player input, provide meaningful choices and give feedback about the effectiveness of those choices. Digital games frequently provide safe places to practice new skills and point-of-need assistance. I try to incorporate as much immediate feedback and point-of-need help into my games as possible, whether they are digital, analog, or a hybrid of the two.

What best practices might you suggest to a librarian that wants to integrate gaming and formative assessment?

Librarians creating educational games should first ask themselves if a game is the right method of instruction, as educational games are riskier and require more resources to develop. Librarians should then ask if they can design a game that fits into the instructional context in which the game will take place, look for opportunities with a good return on investment, and make sure they will have players and the necessary resources. Once they commit to an educational game, they should look for ways of incorporating feedback, point-of-need help, scaffolding, and encouraging self-assessment and critical thinking. Above all, the game should include a balance of being a safe learning environment and not allowing players to progress if they haven't met each of the learning objectives. For example, instead of a game design that eliminates players for mistakes, librarians should design games that provide feedback when a player fails to meet expectations, particularly feedback that inspires critical thinking by giving clues rather than outright answers.