

## LOEX 2016 Conference Report: Pittsburgh, PA

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The 44th annual LOEX conference was held May 5-7, 2016 on the banks of the Monongahela, Allegheny and Ohio Rivers—in beautiful Pittsburgh, PA. Reflecting the city's industrial heritage and recent reinvention, the overall theme noted we should be *Learning from the Past, Building for the Future*. A LOEX-record crowd of over 425 librarians were in attendance to learn from presenters and from each other. After prelim activities on Thursday, including a tour of a museum dedicated to local son Andy Warhol and a practical pre-conference on authentic assessment, attendees enjoyed a Friday morning plenary session and then two days filled with 67 breakout sessions and 13 student poster sessions. Some highlights:

### Crossing the Threshold: Reflective Practice in Information Literacy Development

LOEX 2016's plenary speaker, Dr. Sheila Corral, opened the conference with a presentation about the importance of using reflection in information literacy practices. Dr. Corral is Professor and Chair of the Library & Information Science Program at the University of Pittsburgh – School of Information Sciences.

Utilizing literature from various fields including education, library science and business management, Corral began by reviewing current trends in the library and information world. As we all recognize, librarianship is constantly evolving due to emerging technologies and new structures that present learning challenges for both us and our users. With the surge of information available to the public, we have shifted from providing for others specialized research services to teaching others how to develop their own searching skills. Additionally, with the participatory culture of social networks, users have become more involved in creating, sharing and tagging information content. Librarians are now blending different areas of expertise—including programming, data analysis, instructional and user-experience design—in an effort to broaden our reach and compete with non-information specialists in fields such as the sciences and law who are learning traditional information skills on the job.

Trends in learning and teaching suggest a similar evolution. Learning has become more collaborative with the popularity of makerspaces, learning commons and peer assessment. The rise of technology is ever present with the advance of computational thinking, eLearning and online education, and the urgent need to address related literacies in data, new media and multimodal learn-

ing. These trends have forced librarians to rethink how we approach our own formal education and professional development, as well as how we support informed learning. In this new landscape, reflection will become a central skill in information literacy, as already suggested in current library literature as well as the new ACRL Framework and ACRL's Intentional Teaching Immersion Program.

Corral provided examples of different types of reflection as defined by experts such as Donald Schön (reflecting not only after an event, but also at the same time we are teaching), Beverly Taylor (technical, practical and emancipatory reflection), and Barbara Anne Sen (SEA-Change model of reflection, consisting of situation, evidence and action). In her own classes, Corral teaches the five dimensions model highlighted in detail in *Facilitating Reflective Learning in Higher Education* by Anne Brockbank and Ian McGill, which builds upon Schön's work. She also recommends Jennifer Moon's journal writing activity as a strategy to slow down the pace to engage students in deeper learning. Whichever method or adapted model is applied, the key takeaway is that reflection is a mindset, a continuous process that one must embed in their daily professional practices.

Corral asked us to consider how reflection fits into our competencies for librarianship. While core competencies like subject and information proficiencies are the "building blocks" that define us as experts in our profession, threshold competences are those that move us forward in our profession. Corral believes that reflective practice is a competence that transforms our practice to the next level. Once reflection has become a habitual practice, it will enable us to integrate other key threshold competences such as technological fluency and relationship building. Making time for reflection, encouraging colleagues to adopt the practice and teaching future librarians to develop the skill will be challenging, but ultimately necessary as our responsibilities rapidly move beyond traditional information competences to include complex technological, interpersonal and interdisciplinary expertise.

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## Breakout Sessions

Over the past decade, design thinking, a creative approach toward innovation and problem solving, has become a buzzword in the design and business worlds. In the session, “**What Can We Learn from a Can Opener? Adapting Design Thinking for Library Instruction**,” Elizabeth Psyck of Grand Valley State University explained how design thinking methods can be used to create meaningful instruction sessions. Psyck reviewed seven key mindsets from the Stanford University d.school Bootcamp Bootleg toolkit that are needed to change how we look at problems – including “focus on human values,” “show don’t tell” and “radical collaboration.” She then showed how she developed her own design thinking model for library instruction sessions geared toward first-year students in an honors seminar.

Psyck’s method includes six steps:

1. Define. Create an instruction brief to document class details, manage expectations, identify constraints and determine your audience.
2. Ideate. Brainstorm as many ideas as possible, keeping in mind that bad ideas lead to good ideas.
3. Resolve. Narrow down your ideas by focusing on one or two of them.
4. Plan. Get those ideas out of your head and onto paper in the form of a script, outline, etc.—whatever works, it doesn’t have to be perfect.
5. Feedback. Ask students and colleagues to review your plan. Though this step can be difficult, feedback is absolutely necessary to a well-designed final product.
6. Implement and Assess. Try it out on the class then assess how it went. Did it work? Did the students learn? Take time to self-reflect on the experience.

Somewhat of a misnomer, design thinking is actually more about doing than thinking. It’s a flexible system that isn’t exclusive to designers or innovators as demonstrated in this session. The design thinking process can be learned and it most definitely must be practiced to reap its benefits.

The peer instruction model, originally developed by physics professor Eric Mazur to teach science, is de-

signed to make learning more accessible by actively involving students in the teaching process. During the session “**Into the Gauntlet: Letting Students Teach One Another**,” Jessica Crossfield McIntosh and Amy Parsons shared their experiences adapting Mazur’s model for one-shot library instruction sessions in general education courses at Otterbein University.

Providing examples of various types of cooperative learning strategies, McIntosh and Parsons summarized their process, the first step of which involves breaking students into groups of three to five people. After directing the students to open their group assignment in Google Docs, the instructor gives a brief lecture or review of important skills such as catalog search tips and of databases that are relevant to their class. The groups are given time to answer assignment questions together in the Google Doc. Students then report back to the class with their answers and discovery process.

Peer instruction can be applied to all types of classes and disciplines. There is no one way to use the technique, which gives instructors the opportunity to be creative in their approach. Peer instruction is also assessment-friendly in that students work on assignments and report back to the class, allowing instructors to see firsthand what they have learned. However, the strategy is not without its challenges. It is often difficult to get students to warm up to activities (e.g., they can hesitate to brainstorm as they really don’t want to give a “wrong” response) and then take their time to think about their answers and how they can be applied to future research. It is also challenging to write questions that align with the ACRL Framework. McIntosh and Parsons highly recommend working with colleagues to develop a bank of assignment questions that align with each frame and can also be used for a variety of library instruction sessions. Much like asking students to teach and learn from one another, librarians should adopt the same model in their professional practice.

Faculty and library instructors must continuously develop innovative teaching strategies that are both effective and meaningful for students. In “**Unmediated Archives: Creating an Immersive Experience for Undergraduate Students across the Disciplines**,” Peggy Keeran (Arts & Humanities Reference Librarian), Jennifer Bowers (Social Sciences Librarian), and Katherine Crowe (Curator of Special Collections) from the University of Denver described how they created effective, meaningful learning experiences at their institution. They did this by collaborating with faculty instructors in order to integrate archival experiences into various undergraduate programs. The presenters detailed the successes of three first-year seminar courses in particular: “All That

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Jazz: Literature and Culture of the American Jazz Age” (English), “Memory, History, and Contemporary Native Identity” (Communication Studies), and “Immigrant Stories” (Languages and Literatures).

What made these collaborations successful? Why might other librarians consider incorporating archival experiences into their own teaching? Drawing from their experiences, the presenters observe that archival experiences enhance student engagement. In their class evaluations, one student found the archives “magical” and another found it “eye-opening.” Interaction with primary sources presented “teaching moments” where students could reflect on inherent biases and omissions in primary sources. Faculty noted that students thought themselves to be “better scholars” after being introduced to the resources of the archives and special collections as they now could use primary sources to question the assumptions in certain secondary sources. Beyond student engagement, increased faculty enthusiasm was also noticeable.

The presenters offered several recommendations for incorporating archives into instruction. One is to “use what you have.” In other words, use existing collections in flexible ways. Another recommendation is to balance both structured and exploratory approaches to instruction, as well as analog and digital source collections if possible. Different approaches and sources offer different benefits for students, though it always should be relevant to the students’ class work or personal lives. The presenters emphasize that archival experiences present opportunities for students to reflect critically on the nature of voice and representation.

The Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education offers a general philosophy for information literacy instruction, but it provides no specific outcomes or course plans. This raises the question of how the Framework is actually used in course development. In “**You can Go Your Own Way: Rethinking Credit-Bearing Courses in Light of the Framework**,” Amanda Foster (Instruction Librarian) and Kyle Denlinger (eLearning Librarian) from Wake Forest University reported on how they developed two versions of the same 1.5 credit elective information literacy course, LIB100, each with a different Framework-inspired emphasis: the face-to-face version, developed by Foster, stressed “Scholarship as Conversation,” while the online version, developed by Denlinger, highlighted “Information has Value.” The presentation offered learning outcomes and sample assignments from each version of the course.

This presentation described several online tools and assignments from the course. In the face-to-face, “Scholarship as Conversation” version, students used Prezi to construct reference “family trees” for specific articles, spreadsheets to develop a “synthesis matrix” describing how citations are used in an article, and WikiEdu to experience the communal nature of scholarship. In the online, “Information has Value” version, students were led to paywalls in order to experience the cost of information first-hand, prompted to blog about the privilege, power, and responsibility behind Wikipedia, and asked to create screencast tutorials using Screencast-O-Matic for online search tools.

The ACRL Framework depends on concepts such as metaliteracy and metacognition. But what is metacognition, and how might it be inculcated in students so that they may become better learners? In “**ReThink: Connecting Libraries to Metacognition, Student Learning, and Student Success**,” Amy Riegelman (Government Publications & Social Sciences Librarian) and Kate Peterson (Undergraduate Services Librarian) at the University of Minnesota reported on their contributions to a campus-wide initiative where they promoted awareness of metacognitive strategies. Students who reflect on their own thinking and learning, and who recognize their own cognitive strengths and weaknesses, can strategically restructure their environments in ways that build on their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses. Metacognition takes them from being cognitively passive to being cognitively active.

With this in mind, the presenters reviewed several tools and strategies, including the Pomodoro technique, a method for time management where work periods are broken down into intervals and rest times, so students can make their learning more efficient by reducing procrastination. The presenters also showed tools like citation managers and assignment calculators.

One highlight of the session was a write-pair-share activity where participants considered how much time students spend reading, exploring, analyzing, verifying, and planning during the research process. There was a general consensus in the audience that students spend the least time planning. Some participants observed that students spend a long time exploring but never finishing, while other participants reported that their students spend little time exploring in order to finish assignments quickly. After completing the activity, the presenters described results of an outside study where the research processes of students and experts were compared. The results showed that students spend much more time read-

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ing and exploring than experts, who by contrast read about and analyze problems up front, then plan, explore, and verify. The takeaway from this activity was that the more students become aware of how research works and how they think about and conduct it themselves, the more expert-like they may become.

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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/2016/sessions.html>

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- **Troubleshooting** is a time challenge, and it is also a best practice. Know how to fix the most common technical problems that arise. Always have a backup plan if the SRS fails so the instruction session is not disrupted.
- When starting out with SRS, have **low expectations**. Begin by incorporating one to two questions in a session the first semester. In the second semester, modify your lesson plan to include more.

A fifth best practice comes from the Carl Wieman Science Education Initiative (2009, p. 20). Their research on SRS concluded that, on average, 30 seconds to a minute gives students time to process a question and respond. This timing depends, of course, on the complexity of the question. When about three-fourths of the students have responded, it is often a good time to ask “Any more votes?”

## Conclusion

Student response systems have become commonplace, but when coupled with well-crafted, targeted questions, this technology can help keep library instruction fresh and students engaged. It is important to remember, however, that SRS are just another teaching tool. Technology should always come second to pedagogy, so when using them, the learning objectives for the class must be the guiding force.

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