

Information literacy cooperation by design

Review of a guided collaboration between teaching and library faculty

In 2009, librarians at Washington State's community and technical colleges identified pre-college and basic skills classes as places where students could benefit from information literacy (IL) instruction.¹ The overall goal of the Pre-College Information Literacy Research (PILR) project was to increase and improve IL instruction sessions in pre-college courses while evaluating student achievement of IL outcomes.

The project included many valuable tools to guide instructional collaboration, including a project-specific rubric for IL, guided assignment sheets, assessments of instruction and assignments, and guidelines for shared assessing of student achievement.² By using these tools, librarians and instructional faculty members could arrive at a shared understanding of student achievement. Reviewing how faculty members and librarians responded to this aspect of the PILR project provides insight into building success into IL collaboration.

Need for collaboration in library instruction

Traditional library instruction is often completed with little collaboration between instructional and library faculty. Usually, a teacher contacts the librarian and requests a session that will help students complete a particular assignment. The librarian visits the class, teaches the skills that students will use for the particular assignment, and expresses how important it is for students to ask for help with research. These "one-shot" IL sessions are one way for librarians to reach students with important information about how and why libraries are used. While lessons like this can be effective, it is difficult for the librarian to assess whether in-class activities improve

student success in the course or on future information-seeking endeavors.

Student searching behavior seems to support the idea that students don't always take what is taught in one-shot instruction sessions to heart.

As Heather Groce notes, there is a discrepancy between a librarian's preferred research methods and the way students approach their assignments, particularly as it relates to finding and using scholarly articles.³ After a review of literature, Groce notes that often, when students are assigned to use scholarly articles, they expect to find a broad summary of a topic in article databases that provide scholarly articles.⁴ This expectation on the part of students could be the result of teachers asking specifically for articles from databases without explaining the process of finding broader information in other sources before approaching databases.

The discrepancy between some students' approach to research and more successful search methods, suggests that a librarian's involvement in planning for the assignment is imperative. By getting involved in writing assignments librarians can ensure that students are able to make more effective decisions about why and how particular types of sources are used, just one of many IL outcomes that can be addressed when librarians and teaching faculty integrate outcomes.

The current thinking about IL instruction suggests that collaboration between librarians and faculty is necessary so that students have the best possible experience when searching and using information.

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As Heidi L.M. Jacobs and Dale Jacobs recognized, a more successful model of IL incorporates the course outcomes and IL outcomes so that the librarian and teacher become a more cohesive team.⁵ When librarians and faculty members combine their goals and teach toward achieving cohesiveness that includes IL, the library and IL become an integral part of the institutional and student experience.

The PILR experience

PILR teams agreed to spend four academic quarters on cooperative library instruction, one quarter to plan assignments and instruction and three quarters to actually teach the material, assess student achievement, and revise lessons, as necessary. Each team was asked to use the same planning and assessment paperwork, including a project-wide rubric for assessing student work. Having similar paperwork ensured that everyone followed the same process. The process included the presentation of course level outcomes as well as IL outcomes derived from our shared rubric.

Each team integrated at least one IL outcome into the existing course objectives and then planned an integrated assignment for that outcome. The teams then planned how they would help students achieve success on the integrated assignment. In the second, third, and fourth quarters, the teams taught classes using the integrated assignment. After the assignment was turned in, teams typically met to score students based on the shared rubric.

Finally, teams discussed how students might score higher on the rubric if parts of the lesson were changed to increase understanding. This process helped stress the importance of communication before, during, and after IL instruction. By including the librarian in every step of planning, teaching, and assessing a lesson, the instructor for each course was able to easily revise lessons based on a team approach to identifying places where students had trouble grasping basic ideas.

What PILR teaches about lesson revision

Each quarter of the PILR project, faculty mem-

bers and librarians created a lesson revision document that explained what was planned, what actually happened, and what the team might change in the future. These documents are valuable for many reasons. They show that analysis and revision of lessons improves the team's ability to assess and meet student learning outcomes. While data from the PILR project is still in review, evidence collected from PILR assessments shows that instructors and librarians felt that student achievement of IL objectives as presented on the rubric improved as the project progressed. More importantly, they show that having conversations that include student scores on assignments improves the instruction team's ability to continue to collaborate and improve IL assignments.⁶

These after-instruction reports and lesson revisions are full of plans to increase college readiness and achievement of outcomes. As an example, one team that assessed students on their ability to articulate a topic and locate sources in the library noted that, "most students simply found sources that reiterated what they already knew from personal experience, instead of expanding their knowledge with new information. To be expected at this level, but maybe a revision of the assignment or more deliberate critical thinking instruction would help students go further in their research."⁷ Comments like this one demonstrate how librarians worked with faculty members to incorporate IL into broader outcomes, such as critical thinking.

Perceptions of PILR

As part of their involvement in PILR, teachers were surveyed every other quarter about their experience. These surveys are valuable in understanding how instructional faculty view long-term cooperation with their librarian peers. Reading the survey results helps to identify issues that librarians might want to address when collaborating with faculty members.

Survey results seem to support the need for creating a guided process, at least for the first few interactions with a faculty member. When asked about the usefulness of a tem-

plate for designing integrated assignments, most teachers commented that they liked the template to begin the conversation, but found it unnecessary after several collaborations with the librarian.

One teacher shared, “This is the fifth quarter using the template and assignments we’ve created, so we’re a well-oiled machine by now. I think it’s most helpful the first quarter or two...”⁸ This seems to suggest that in lesson planning, librarians should approach instructional faculty with a process that will fit both parties’ needs in reaching learning outcomes. Interaction would become more informal once a relationship has been established.

At the beginning of PILR, each team agreed to work with the project rubric, which was created with input from librarians and pre-college faculty throughout Washington State. The rubric served as both a planning and assessment tool. Teachers seemed to appreciate the rubric for its concise description of student behaviors leading to sufficient growth in the information literacy areas.

After using the rubric to assess student achievement, instructors were asked to evaluate what they might change in their teaching based on the use of the rubric. The feedback on this question was often very thoughtful. Teachers noted concerns over reading level of research materials, quality of students’ completed work, discrepancy between the design of the assignment and how the rubric measured success, as well as clearly described expectations.

One instructor noted, “...we find that we want more evidence of certain aspects of the research process, but worksheets do not fully capture what we are looking for.”⁹ This, and observations like it, help to show how shared evaluation using a rubric can affect future assignments.

Overall, teaching faculty responses to the project were positive. Faculty members were excited to work with librarians and many committed to maintaining connections beyond the conclusion of the PILR project. Faculty members were excited to have their students connect more fully to IL outcomes while still meeting current course objectives.

Working in a guided design

PILR was a particularly time-intensive project where participants agreed to sustain focus on IL as a part of regular class planning. The project was successful in helping librarians and teaching faculty to meld outcomes and then assess student work together. The inclusion of project paperwork, including the rubric, integrated assignment worksheet, and evaluation of lesson objectives forms helped to ensure that participants discussed and integrated as many IL and course objectives as possible.

For the most part, these extensive documents were well-liked by participants who had never experienced the melding of IL and course objectives before. However, the guided process became frustrating for people after the first couple of quarters. The best interactions seemed to come from teams that agreed to loosen the formality of the project after the process was clear to everyone involved.

Notes

1. Washington State Community and Technical College Librarians, “PILR Project,” Library as Instructional Leader Grant, accessed February 28, 2013, <http://informationliteracywactc.pbworks.com/w/page/19923214/PILR%20Pre-college%20Information%20Literacy%20Research>.
2. Ibid.
3. Heather Groce, “Information seeking habits and information literacy of community and junior college students a review of the literature,” *Community and Junior College Libraries*, 14, no. 3 (2008), 197.
4. Ibid.
5. Heidi L.M. Jacobs and Dale Jacobs, “Transforming the One-Shot Library Session into Pedagogical Collaboration: Information Literacy and the English Composition Class,” *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (2009): 76.
6. Washington State Community and Technical College Librarians, n.p.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid. *~*