Library instruction: Recreating the image

By Barbara Love
Reference Librarian
St. Lawrence College

A report on the 16th Annual Workshop on Instruction in Library Use.

The imaginatively titled theme of the 16th Annual Workshop on Instruction in Library Use, “Recreating the Image,” prepared the ground for an extremely stimulating conference. The workshop was held May 13–15, 1987, in Hamilton, Ontario, on the leafy grounds of McMaster University (where 100th birthday celebrations were underway) and was jointly sponsored by McMaster and Mohawk College. The sessions succeeded in shaking some of our beliefs in the value of what we teach and encouraged participants to reconsider both the methods and the content of traditional library instruction.

The workshop opened with an animated debate entitled, “Immodest Proposals: Alternative Futures for Bibliographic Instruction,” in which the speakers, Tom Eadie of the University of Waterloo, Tanis Fink from Seneca College, and Jocelyn Foster, a Ph.D. student at the University of British Columbia, considered the intrinsic worth of traditional methods of library instruction and possible alternatives to what we are currently teaching.

Tom Eadie opened the debate with the provocative argument that library instruction, especially when not point–of–use, should probably be abandoned. Repetitive reference questions (on catalogue use and periodical index interpretation) continue unabated even when a well-maintained instruction program is in place. His feeling was that the level of sophistication and information on tours is too great for the student masses herded through the library each fall and that good signage, self-paced teaching workbooks and self-guided audio tours would be of more benefit to students than workshops that take place before the students are motivated by an immediate need. Eadie argued that the generic workshops aimed at teaching students how to do term papers or research assignments have the same design flaw as the one-size fits-all clothing—that of really fitting no one well. On the other hand, the specialized sessions tailored to the needs of a specific assignment, usually turn out to be nothing more than hour-long oral bibliographies.

Tanis Fink countered with a proposal for replacing personalized instruction with computer-assisted instructional packages. She argued that CAI is economical and quick and that it will overcome librarian burnout by answering repetitive questions and freeing the librarian to handle the more complex and interesting ones. To bolster her arguments, she cited studies that proved CAI more effective than class instruction and at least as effective as personal tutorials.

Jocelyn Foster aimed to bring the discussion back to earth by advocating, less provocatively, that we continue to do what we are now doing but better and more frequently. She disagreed that
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allowing us to learn.

Michael Orme, of the Ontario Institute for Stud­

ies in Education, presented a highly entertaining,

but ultimately practical, session called "The Effective

Use of Humor in Instruction." His thesis was that good pacing and reinforcement techniques en­
hanced with a healthy dose of humor will keep stu­
dents interested and motivated. He argued that

since people require variation, they will find it for

themselves (doodling, daydreaming, chatting, etc.) if it is not provided by the teacher. A stimulus

variation strategy builds in novelty, complexity and surprise. By using these teaching techniques, the

instructor will be able to get the active attention

of the students and will then be able to steer

them into learning. Orme stressed that while hu­

mor has energizing properties that actually aid the

learning process, it has to be subject-related or the

teacher will lose credibility. Leavening a class pre­

sentation with humor enlivens the class and en­
courages respect and response. This is exactly the

way in which Michael Orme conducted his ses­

sions, a fast and funny hour and a half. It was only

after consulting my jokeless notes, that I became

aware of how much valuable information was ac­
tually communicated. Just as he advised us, Orme

exploited the expectations of his audience to upset

our preconceived ideas of what he was going to say,

allowing us to learn.

Marion Wilburn, coordinator of the Library

Techniques Program at Sherdan College spoke on

"Structuring a Classroom Presentation." Her

three-part message emphasized "simplifying, do­
ing and pacing." Before preparing a classroom ses­

sion, she advised us to pare down what has to be

communicated to an essential minimum, outlining

what students must know, should know and could

know. She then proposed dumping everything that

they could know, most of what they should know,

and even (heretieally) some of what they must

know. After simplifying what to teach, Wilburn

advised us to make use of what she described as the

"doing" principle: students learn skills by practic­ing

them, so lecturing should be interspersed with

workbooks, exercises, manuals, labs, experiments or guides. Finally, for a well-timed presentation,

activity levels should be varied at about 20-minute

intervals to keep the students' attention spans at

their peak.

Threae Wesley, coordinator of instructional

services at Northern Kentucky University, offered

the perfect response to Tom Eadie's opening objec­tions to traditional library instruction. Her session

dealt with the instruction program in place at

Northern Kentucky which emphasizes evaluative

research skills and eschews the teaching of cata­

logue use and periodical index interpretation. She

described the evolution of this process as having be­

gun with a collective daydream about the ideal li­

brary instruction session. The "daydreamers" con­

cluded that, ideally, library instruction would

teach concepts rather than tools and would stress evaluative research skills. This sort of instruction

would bring the library more in line with main­stream goals of higher education—creating intel­

lectual explorers. The evaluative research skills

they aimed to teach were: breaking up a complex idea into its component parts, determining appro­
priate types of primary and secondary sources, raising questions, suspending judgement until re­

search is ended, and questioning the authority of sources. To encourage students to break up a com­plex idea into components, Wesley described the

process of brainstorming on a particular student's

topic. The class would be asked to think of that

topic from a number of differing viewpoints, i.e. for a science assignment they would be encouraged

to suggest sociological, anthropological and psy­

chological aspects of that topic which would ulti­
mately yield more insightful research. To under­

stand and appreciate the differences between primary and secondary sources, the students would

be asked to read a couple of articles before the class and then to discuss the differing points of view,

who holds them, who the authors are, and what background facts the students need to know more about the issue.

Getting students to use library guides effectively

was accomplished by making them think about the

information from the organizer's point of view.

Graduate students might role play and take the

parts of a writer, and editor, publisher, acquisition

librarian and indexer in order to understand why

and how certain types of information are pub­

lished, bought by libraries, classified and indexed.

To demonstrate timeliness, the librarians take a

subject heading like "communism" and show stu­
dents how differently titles from Reader's Guide

have appeared over the last four decades. A class in

marketing research might be given a brief oral bib­

liography and discussion about the organization of

the sources. The librarian then uses a case study to

to get the class to develop a marketing strategy that

makes use of the various sources.

To get the class to discriminate among the sug­

gested information sources, they may be asked to

compare audience level and point of view from ci­
tations on the same topic from Reader's Guide and

the Social Science Index. This may be followed up

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with a comparison of actual articles. In addition, the same sort of comparison could be done with a photocopy of a subject microfiche card to estimate the likely information yield based on titles, dates, numbers of pages, etc.

This session was a literal eye-opener to the majority of us who have previously questioned how but not what to teach in a one-hour library instruction class. The idea that the session can be made far more interesting to both the librarian and to the students and ultimately more valuable in terms of advancing educational goals, seemed truly revolutionary. No doubt, many of the workshop participants have returned to their jobs with a clear-eyed goal and a great deal of insight into recreating the image.

1987 LOEX Conference moves to Ohio

The annual LOEX bibliographic instruction conference has been held in Ypsilanti, Michigan, ever since 1971. In 1987 it left home and headed south to Columbus, where the Ohio State University Libraries co-hosted the 15th in the series on May 6–8. The current plan is to keep the conference on the road for the next several years.

LOEX, the national Library Orientation-Instruction Exchange Clearinghouse, was established in 1972 at Eastern Michigan University. Its mission is to promote communication among libraries with instruction programs, to assist libraries interested in developing such programs, to aid in research endeavors, and to coordinate activities among state and regional library instruction clearinghouses. LOEX fulfills its mission in part by providing a clearinghouse of instructional materials and by sponsoring an annual conference.

The Ohio State Program Committee recommended that the general theme of the conference be “Defining and Applying Teaching Strategies.” The committee sought a balance between high tech and “low tech” with presentations to be made by BI librarians new to the field and sage advice given by veteran BI presenters.

Several major speakers were featured: Keith Cottam, director of the University of Wyoming Libraries, gave the keynote address, “Teaching: No Greater Professional Role”; Joan Ormondroyd, reference and instruction librarian at Cornell University, addressed the topic of in-service training for BI librarians; Thomas McNally, head of circu-
The University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, hosted a special reception on May 20, 1987, to celebrate the completion of the Congressional Papers Project and the opening of a traveling exhibit based on the papers of Senator Warren G. Magnuson and the late Senator Henry M. Jackson. Nearly two hundred guests came to honor these two remarkable Senators whose papers reflect an impressive four-decade legacy to public service. Among those present were Senator and Mrs. Magnuson, Helen Jackson, widow of the late Senator Scoop Jackson, and members of their families.

The brief program featured University President William B. Gerberding, Professor Kenneth Pyle of the university’s Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, Robert Burke, professor of history, and Brewster Denny, professor of public affairs. Helen Jackson and Warren Magnuson completed the program with remarks and reminiscences.

This reception, most of all, was a tribute to the distinguished careers of two statesmen who represented the State of Washington during the tenure of eight different Presidents from the Great Depression to the 1980s. The papers of these two Senators together comprise over 3,000 linear feet of shelving and include correspondence, speeches, writings, notes, reports, committee files, trip files, photographs, audio tapes, 16mm films, and videotapes.

Senator and Mrs. Magnuson transferred the Magnuson papers to the University of Washington in 1981. Helen Jackson donated the papers of her late husband in 1983 shortly after his death. Although initial processing had begun when these papers were first donated, a special appropriation by the Washington State Legislature in 1984 allowed a more thorough and expeditious completion of this major project. The computerized inventory of these archives has been reproduced in microfiche and is available from the University Libraries for a fee. Most of the papers are open for use to interested researchers and the general public. Some will be opened at a later date in accordance with the wishes of the donors. As installments of these archives have been processed, they have been made available for public use. Nearly one hundred researchers have already consulted these files.

The 24-panel exhibit entitled, “A Legacy of Public Service,” highlights the issues with which each senator was closely associated: commerce, consumer affairs, agriculture, scientific research, health care, environmental policy, defense and foreign policy, and human rights. The early lives and political campaigns of each senator are also featured. The exhibit was designed by Eric Taylor of Taylor’s Exhibits in Seattle in close collaboration with the staff of the Congressional Papers Project and faculty advisers. Throughout this fall, the exhibit will be available to organizations and institutions through Exhibit Touring Services in Olympia, Washington.

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