

LIRT News

[June 2009](#)

Volume 31, Number 4

LIRT's Top Twenty for 2008

Selected and reviewed by the LIRT Top 20 Committee: Susanna Cowan, Kate Gronemyer (Co-Chair), Ru Story-Huffman, Lisa McDaniels, Emily Nimsakont, Suzie Remilien, Mark Shores, Connie Stovall, Elise Tomlinson, and Esteban Valdez (Co-Chair).

Committee members reviewed over 350 articles relating to library instruction and information literacy. The Committee worked mostly online, using Google Groups for communication and Google Documents for inputting individual rankings. Though the majority of the articles are weighted towards academic libraries, the ideas they discuss will be helpful to a wide range of libraries. The Committee hopes you read and enjoy them!

Alfino, Mark, Michele Pajer, Linda Pierce, and Kelly O'Brien Jenks. "Advancing Critical Thinking and Information Literacy Skills in First Year College Students." **College & Undergraduate Libraries**. 15.1/2 (2008): 81-98.

This article discusses how a pilot program has worked to integrate information literacy skills at the curricular level into a two linked core courses, English composition and Critical Thinking. The method the authors describe includes collaboration between both faculty members and a librarian and the development of sequenced assignments that address not only specific course goals but also the wider goals of the core "thought and expression" block into which both courses fall. Having laid out the theoretical grounding of both composition and critical thinking teaching traditions, the article goes on to describe the collaborative assignments that resulted from this model: a Wikipedia assignment, a Point of View assignment, and a Researched Argument essay. In discussing the specifics of the assignments, each designed to build on the previous, the authors argue that the impact of early introduction to methods of creating (and expressing) knowledge, followed by an assignment that focused on evaluating the quality of sources, could be seen in the quality of research and writing that emerged in the final research papers. This article is particularly useful for librarians and faculty members who are looking for models for collaboration and specifically, in educational terminology, models for "scaffolded" assignment sequences that address the overlapping educational goals of critical thinking, writing, and information literacy. The authors note that they must still find adequate ways to measure student improvement and success—even as it stands, this article is a strong contribution to current discussions of information

literacy, especially for those interested in new models of instruction that move information literacy out of the library and solidly into the curriculum itself.

Allen, Maryellen. "Promoting Critical Thinking Skills in Online Information Literacy Instruction using a Constructivist Approach." **College & Undergraduate Libraries** 15.1/2 (2008): 21-38.

Allen's article addresses the shared goals of information literacy and critical thinking pedagogy and the extent to which they can be met in an increasingly online-only environment. Allen spends some time delving into the theoretical differences between "critical thinking" and "information literacy," and—although this is interesting—the second part of the essay, which turns to the discussion of learner-based online information literacy, is the more interesting part of her argument. In order to improve upon one-directional, static online learning (present information to read/watch and then assess knowledge), Allen suggests a constructivist approach to online learning. Following Piaget's theories of constructivist learning, Allen advocates active learning models that go beyond simple "hands-on" activity. Constructivist learning is problem-based, pushing the learner to use what skills/ knowledge they have and experiment with new skills when old ones fail. As an example, Allen describes a problem that requires a student to go beyond Google/the Web to get an answer but does not prohibit use of the Web in its presentation of the problem. In other words, the student uses Google and, after Google fails, the student then turns to databases or other proffered tools. She warns that this approach is best suited to situations where students have some prior knowledge—it is not appropriate as a tool to introduce brand new knowledge/ skills. In fact, Allen suggests that a hybrid approach may be best for online learning objects: static tools (screencasts, quizzes, etc.) for introductory concepts and more complex problem-based online modules for more advanced learners and skills. Allen further acknowledges that this approach requires significantly more time and technical skill from librarians and educators—but is nonetheless, she argues, the optimal model.

Arant-Kaspar, Wendi, and Candace Benefiel. "Drive-by BI." **Reference Services Review** 36.1 (2008): 39-47.

This article describes efforts by Texas A&M University librarians to reach students through short, in-class instructional sessions. Quick sessions in which students are introduced to relevant resources for their field can open the door to more library use by these students. The authors discuss important factors in the success of such a program, such as a good relationship between librarians and teaching faculty, and timing the sessions at a point in the semester when they will be most useful to students. One positive outcome of the program at Texas A&M is the fact that many of the faculty members who are scheduling these short

sessions are different from those who traditionally took advantage of library instruction offerings, showing that this is truly a way to reach a new audience.

Budd, John M. "Cognitive Growth, Instruction, and Student Success." **College & Research Libraries** 69.4 (2008): 319- 330.

Budd questions the sufficiency of the information literacy standards in meeting instruction goals and argues that the "intentional effort to learn and to know" or phenomenological cognition action is a missing part of the standards. He contrasts this framework, which relies on students constructing their own knowledge by using logic and by engaging in dialogue with one another, with the standards' emphasis on searching and retrieval skills. Budd then describes how the University of Missouri-Columbia used this phenomenological approach to design a course.

Bussert, Kaila, Nicole E. Brown, and Alison H. Armstrong. "IL 2.0 at the American University in Cairo: "Flickr" in the Classroom." **Internet Reference Services Quarterly** 13.1 (2008) 1-13.

Librarians at the American University in Cairo incorporated Web 2.0 tools like social bookmarking site del.icio.us and photo sharing site Flickr into the curriculum of a semester long information literacy course. These tools not only engage the students, but are used to teach transferable skills and concepts; the authors give an example of an exercise with Flickr that can help students understand database organization, tagging and controlled vocabulary. They discuss the concept of information literacy 2.0, adding "participation, interaction, and fluidity" to the more traditional "finding, evaluating, and using" facets of IL.

Chu, Samuel Kai-Wah, and Nancy Law. "The Development of Information Search Expertise of Research Students." **Journal of Librarianship & Information Science** 40.3 (2008): 165- 177.

In a one-year longitudinal study Chu and Law explore the ways PhD students develop information research knowledge, how that expertise evolves over time, and the four stages students go through as expertise is refined. The study finds that information skills development is still essential at the graduate level and that graduate students should be trained by discipline, as the stages depend at least minimally on a progression from the general to the specific within a given subject area. The study also reveals that learning about two elements of research are most important: information resources and searching skills. That any given student advances throughout all four stages correlates with the complexity and specificity of the research topic. Ultimately, defining these four stages ought to help with developing guidelines in meeting end-user needs.

Deitering, Anne-Marie, and Sara Jameson. "Step by Step through the Scholarly Conversation: A Collaborative Library/ Writing Faculty Project to Embed Information Literacy and Promote Critical Thinking in First Year Composition at Oregon State University." **College & Undergraduate Libraries** 15.1/2 (2008): 57-79.

This article describes collaboration between librarians and the writing program at Oregon State University to teach information literacy in the context of first-year composition. The program goes far beyond simply teaching library skills, helping students learn how to participate in the scholarly conversation by exploring their topics, learning from sources, and learning how to synthesize their own ideas with information found elsewhere. The authors explain how the information literacy component of the course has evolved to its current iteration, a fully integrated multi-assignment information literacy portfolio (ILP). They describe how they have handled common difficulties with students, the graduate teaching assistants who teach first-year composition, and with the librarians who teach the ILP.

Gardner, Julia, and David Pavelich. "Teaching with Ephemera." **RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, & Cultural Heritage** 9.1 (2008): 86-92.

In this article, two special collections librarians present ways in which they engage undergraduate students with their collection of ephemera – historical items only useful for a short time, such as pamphlets, posters, or ticket stubs. During instructional sessions in the special collections research center, librarians make use of ephemeral materials in order to teach students critical thinking skills. In the authors' words, "we instruct our students to seek materials in special collections and evaluate what they find...We encourage an interactive and lively discussion in our spaces and define the librarian as a facilitator for discussion" (needs page number). Ephemeral materials are used to help students create context for historical periods they are studying; they also serve as lessons in evaluating the information found in primary sources and how this might differ from evaluating secondary sources. This article offers an insightful look at an area of the library that is often overlooked in library instruction literature.

Hayes-Bohanan, Pamela, and Elizabeth Spievak. "You can Lead Students to Sources, but can You make Them Think?" **College & Undergraduate Libraries** 15.1/2 (2008): 173-210.

This article outlines an example of collaboration between a librarian and psychology professor. Concentrating on a first-year course, the authors delineate how the two joined forces to integrate information literacy and critical thinking into a first year psychology course. The authors discovered that critical thinking

concepts that were taught in an explicit manner were more easily absorbed by the students than concepts taught using implicit methods. The authors began by identifying students' critical thinking problems and abilities and then developed a method for professors and librarians to incorporate information literacy into the curriculum. Using learning theory, course curriculum was developed that address both psychology topics and information literacy. The article provides examples of assignments that include critical thinking, information literacy, and psychology, with the appendix providing detailed expression of the assignments used in the course. This is a good article that considers the collaborative and critical thinking aspects of information literacy.

Jacobs, Heidi, L. M. "Information Literacy and Reflective Pedagogical Praxis." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 34.3 (2008): 256-262

In continuing the discussion about how academic librarians and LIS programs can improve the approach to teaching information literacy, Jacobs calls upon the work of James Elmborg, Rolf Norgaard and Dane Ward, as well as Paulo Freire and others to adopt the framework of critical literacy/critical pedagogy in a professional praxis. This transformation can begin with a "creative, reflective dialogue" between librarians, between librarians and students and between librarians and faculty, cultivating a "problem-posing" model that situates information literacy firmly within an ongoing critical inquiry, borrowing from the experience of colleagues in other literacies such as Composition and Rhetoric. Jacobs cautions against placing too much emphasis on standards and rubrics; instead of the less messy summative evaluations, those involved should utilize the more complex critical analysis needed for lifelong learning and empowerment of individuals and communities. Jacobs models well, not proposing tips and tricks, but posing some questions we can use to begin this reflective inquiry.

Johnson, Corey M., Elizabeth B Lindsay, and Scott Walter. "Learning More about how They Think: Information Literacy Instruction in a Campus-Wide Critical Thinking Project." *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 15. 1-2 (2008): 231- 254.

The authors describe both the successes and the limitations of various collaborative information literacy initiatives at Washington State University over the past 10 years. Building on the positive partnerships the librarians have developed with faculty in teaching first-year experience seminars and other programs, the authors detail a new program in which the library instruction department is partnering with faculty to co-create course pages. These pages combine information literacy and critical thinking skills into course assignments and evaluation, designing and placing tutorials and other tools where students need them in the context of a specific course.

Kwon, Nahyun. "A Mixed-Methods Investigation of the Relationship Between Critical Thinking and Library Anxiety Among Undergraduate Students in Their Information Search Process." **College & Research Libraries** 69.2 (2008): 117-131.

This article expands on a previous study by Kwon, Anthony Onwuegbuzie and Linda Alexander (2007) about library anxiety and critical thinking that focuses on graduate students. Kwon employed quantitative and qualitative analysis to look at the nature of this association and found that undergraduates with weak critical thinking skills are more likely to suffer from library anxiety. Not only does this article provide further insight on the negative link between library anxiety and critical thinking skills, but it also suggests ways in which instruction librarians can help build students' confidence in their critical thinking skills.

Macdonald, Katrina. "ESL Library Skills: An Information Literacy Program for Adults with Low Levels of English Literacy." **Australian Library Journal** 57.3 (2008): 295-309.

This article introduces an English as a Second Language information literacy project (ESLILP) geared towards adult learners at the University of Ballarat in Australia. Basic library skills were embedded into the curriculum of an English language proficiency certificate course. Educational backgrounds varied among the students involved—students in the program had educational backgrounds running the gamut from having been taught using oral traditions only (leading to illiteracy in their own language) to PhD students. Participants learned about elements of library items, collections and facilities, borrowing and returning, asking for help, subject areas, using call numbers, searching the catalogue, and being courteous in the library. Instruction activities included peer teaching and correction and a playful learning environment. After the course, an independent evaluation of the ESLILP program was conducted using semi-structured group interviews. The program was found to be "very successful in meeting..... its desired outcome: at the end of the Project the students in the target group can now confidently and effectively use the library." The authors also found that the program had a positive impact on the students' personal lives, especially as it related to helping their children. Many librarians do not have ESL teaching skills, so the partnership with an ESL instructor – who attended all the sessions - was very important. The library at University of Ballarat is offering a free CD-ROM on how to implement the ESLIIP program.

McPherson, Keith. "Shaping Global Criticality with School Libraries." **School Libraries Worldwide** 14.2 (2008): 35-44.

Students all over the world are increasingly using Internet-based communication and information technologies. Citing a Canadian study, McPherson says that almost 70% of students still need help in assessing the authenticity of online information, and 75% were unaware of advertising incorporated into online product centered games. While the print-based literacy skills that school librarians teach does help with learning to surf the Internet, there are two additional skills that McPherson says are needed: multi-literacies instruction and critical engagement. Multi-literacies instruction allow students to “access a larger set of communication forms, communicate across cultural boundaries” and, consequently, contribute positively to society. Critical literacy, the definition of which McPherson borrows from the New London Group, is the ability to “actively and independently reflect upon and question the assumptions, goals, views, relations....operating in human social, political, and economic systems” ranging from the micro to the macro level. Developing critical literacy helps students avoid internalizing the commercial, violent, and sexualized messages buried in some Internet-based communication technologies. McPherson provides a list of suggested activities designed to help students cultivate multi-literacies and critical literacy, as well as a list of resources that school librarians can use to develop lesson plans.

Oakleaf, Megan. “Dances and Opportunities: A Conceptual Map of Information Literacy Assessment Approaches.” **Portal: Libraries and the Academy** 8.3 (2008): 233-53.

Presenting a variety of assessment methods tied to information literacy, this article is useful for a variety of reasons. The author presents background, benefits, and limitations of fixed-choice tests, performance assessments, and rubrics. The academic library that offers information literacy courses or programs needs to become involved in the assessment movement of determining what students knows--better known as student learning objectives. The library must develop assessments that measure the learning outcomes expected of students who partake in information literacy programs. Concluding that libraries need to make assessment choices based on availability, the dangers and opportunities of each assessment method, and the needs of the library and institution, Oakleaf provides the reader with an opportunity to explore assessment in a well written format. For those who appreciate visual representation of information, graphics and tables that outline the benefits and limitations of each assessment tool are added bonuses.

Schiller, Nicholas. “A Portal to Student Learning: What Instruction Librarians can Learn from Video Game Design.” **Reference Services Review** 36.4 (2008): 351-365.

Schiller offers a compelling argument that librarians and other educators ought to look to gaming, not only to utilize in every day teaching, but as a means of analyzing the underlying pedagogies being used. Examining pedagogies ultimately helps assist librarians in becoming better teachers. The author provides analytical tools to help discover the pedagogy incorporated into different types of games. As an example, Schiller analyzes Portal, a game set in a scientist's laboratory. Analysis reveals that Portal employs scaffolding, layering, gating, and trial and error to teach users how to play the game itself, the latter tactic is often ignored in academia. Additionally, the game gathers assessment data so that its designers might improve their product. Perhaps most noteworthy, Portal designers note that introducing too many concepts at once causes poor retention.

Schiller, Nicholas. "Finding a Socratic Method for Information Literacy Instruction." **College & Undergraduate Libraries** 15.1/2 (2008): 39-56.

This article shows specific examples of how librarians can use guided questions, discussion, and refutation to engage students in critical thinking about their research. The author points out that the Socratic Method is different from traditional instructional methods in that the instructor's role is not to add new knowledge but instead to help students to realize what they don't know. Once students discover the limits of their understanding they become more motivated to find answers to their unanswered questions. The article does an excellent job of translating examples of the types of dialog used by Plato into dialogs librarians can use to engage their students in the information literacy process. In one example, the author shows how a particular line of questioning does not teach the student how to find appropriate scholarly sources, but instead helps the students discover that simple keyword searches in Google are ineffective for academic research.

Taylor, Linda Heichman. "Information Literacy in Subject-Specific Vocabularies: A Path to Critical Thinking." **College & Undergraduate Libraries** 15.1/2 (2008): 141-158.

This article details the importance of increasing students' understanding of subject-specific vocabularies at an early stage of their intellectual development. The author identifies a variety of ways that business students' information literacy and critical thinking skills are hindered by their inability to fully grasp business concepts and terminology. Library and business faculty developed a vocabulary-building workshop curriculum that successfully incorporated multiple learning styles including lecture, group discussion, peer coaching, and individual and group exercises that emphasized active learning. Although the author readily admits that it is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify "critical thinking," measures

were taken to show that specific learning outcomes were achieved. Examples are well illustrated and exercises are shown that that could easily be adapted to a variety of disciplines with subject-specific vocabularies.

Travis, Tiffini A. "Librarians as Agents of Change: Working with Curriculum Committees using Change Agency Theory." **New Directions for Teaching and Learning** 114 (2008): 17- 33.

Travis discusses various aspects change agent theory, including barriers to change, and argues that librarians striving to inject information literacy into the curriculum must understand how institutional change occurs. The author states that, "by understanding the evolution of a change initiative from its early inception to the adoption stage and finally the diffusion process, it is possible to develop a systematic method from an impact on lifelong learning." Travis also describes the role that change agent theory had on successful efforts to incorporate curriculum based information literacy at California State University, Long Beach.

VanScoy, Amy, and Megan J. Oakleaf. "Evidence vs. Anecdote: Using Syllabi to Plan Curriculum-Integrated Information Literacy Instruction." **College and Research Libraries** 69.6 (2008): 566-575.

The authors argue that rather than relying on what they think should be taught, librarians involved in curriculum-integrated instruction should instead focus on studying course syllabi to better gauge what students are expected to use for their assignments. Most often, librarians use a "tiered" approach to instruction where basic skills are introduced to first and second year students and only later in their academic careers are they exposed to advanced skills. Studying course syllabi on their respective campuses, the authors found that many first and second year students are required to use a diverse array of sources ranging from books and articles to data and statistics. Rather than relying on anecdotal evidence, studying course syllabi and understanding what is expected from students, allows librarians to better design relevant classes for their students.