

ACRL Institute for Information Literacy - Illinois Immersion 2007

July 13-18, Illinois State University Normal, IL.

Hosted by CARLI with support of the Illinois State Library

Illinois Immersion Report

Kent Carrico, Instruction and Off-Campus Services Librarian, Benedictine University

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the support of LIBRAS for allowing me this incredible opportunity to grow and learn in my profession.

Illinois Immersion 2007 was described on its own Website as “four-and-one-half days of active learning and intensive interaction among academic librarians”. In retrospect, this description hardly seems adequate, as the level of experience and intensity that participants went through during the roughly 60 hours of being immersed was nothing short of breathtaking, and lessons learned and friends made in that relatively short time will guide my professional library career for years to come.

The decision to apply to Immersion was enthusiastically encouraged by the Library Director Jack Fritts, who has no equal as an advocate for professional development of librarians. He suggested I apply to the Program Track which focused on developing, integrating, and managing institutional and programmatic information literacy programs, whereas my colleague, Sue Peterson was encouraged towards the Teacher Track, which focuses on individual development for enhancing, refreshing, or extending their individual instruction skills.

Around the time of the application deadline, I had spoken with a trusted colleague who conveyed that she had attended ACRL Immersion in Rhode Island a few years earlier in the Program Track. She confided her experience dramatically impacted her understanding of Information Literacy and was well worth the time and effort expended. In passing she left me with the feeling that the only way to truly understand Immersion was to experience it, and in retrospect, that intuition was spot on, because on May 5th I was welcomed as a participant to Illinois Immersion 2007 in the Program Track and so the experience began.

Immersion starts from the moment of acceptance in the guise of a pre-Immersion assignment that all Program and Teacher Track participants were required to compose and post prior to arrival in Normal, IL. The Program Track assignment assigned me to “develop a case study of the programmatic environment of Benedictine University as a prelude to the creation of an action plan during the Immersion Program. The Action Plan was an outline of a possible solution to the programmatic needs identified in the case study”.

Communication between Immersion faculty and participants was carried out via an illinoisimmersion@ala.org discussion list, standard email correspondence, and through accounts

ACRL Institute for Information Literacy - Illinois Immersion 2007

July 13-18, Illinois State University Normal, IL.

Hosted by CARLI with support of the Illinois State Library

created for us using WebCT. WebCT quickly became our pre-Immersion information commons, a place where participants and faculty introduced themselves to the Immersion body, where questions were posted and discussed concerning the Immersion process itself, or where information pertinent to traveling and staying at ISU were bandied back and forth. It was also the repository of pre-Immersion reading assignments (and there were several), and a place where some participants were able to create their own Web page and attach links to their individual MySpace, FaceBook, or other social software accounts. The feeling became one of a virtual community and common purpose the binding thread of our Immersion fabric.

The description of Immersion as “intensive interaction” was certainly not overstating the process in the least. The atmosphere was friendly, intense, engaging and exciting. When not actively involved with program activities and sessions spanning 10 hours a day we were scheduled to be together outside the classroom through bonding activities bent on relaxing and collegially keeping us all together. Program Management, Program Development, Assessment, Student Engagement, Learning Outcomes, and Campus Culture, were intermixed with eating, bowling, picnics, attending an Information Literacy film fest and Shakespeare under the stars and even more eating. After an active and tiring day/evening it was off to the Hamilton-Whitten dormitories where tiny beds and communal showers (another interesting bonding activity) lie in wait, before starting the process all over again at 6:30 the next morning.

The Immersion faculty was stellar and included:

- Debra Gilchrist, Director of Library/Media Services for Pierce College Lakewood, Washington - Especially focused on assessment as learning, developing learning outcomes and instructional design and incorporating IL assessments into course assessments
- Randy Hensley, Student Learning Programs & Services for University of Hawaii at Manoa – Dynamic persona, focusing on areas of learning styles, instructional design, teaching methods, learning communities, and being an authentic teacher
- Mary C. MacDonald, Head of Instruction for the University of Rhode Island – Co-authored *The Plan for Information Literacy at the University of Rhode Island, Creating a Comprehensive Information Literacy Plan, Teaching Information Literacy: 35 Practical Standards Based Exercises*.
- Dane Ward, Associate Dean of Public Services for Illinois State University – Coauthored *The Collaborative Imperative: Librarians and Faculty Working Together in the Information Universe* and is more recently interested in organizational culture and the development of Information Literacy Programs
- Beth S. Woodward, Central Information Services Librarian, UIUC – Coordinates graduate assistant training, continuing education, departmental instructional planning and development, and library-wide Coordinator for Staff Development

ACRL Institute for Information Literacy - Illinois Immersion 2007

July 13-18, Illinois State University Normal, IL.

Hosted by CARLI with support of the Illinois State Library

and Training. Serves as a consultant for improving instruction programs and co-edits the Information Literacy column for *Reference & User Services Quarterly* (RUSQ)

Many important ideas were forwarded throughout the Immersion process in both Teaching and Program Tracks and among the most pervasive in my mind were those of learning outcomes, assessment, and authentic teaching.

Key questions asked in both Teaching and Program Learning Outcomes are:

- What do you want the students to be able to do?
- What does the student need to know in order to do this well?
- What activity will facilitate the learning?
- How will the student demonstrate the learning?
- How will I know the student has done this well?

Debra Gilchrist asked the Program Track to improve the student experience by developing clear learning outcomes. The five questions asked that impact assessment design for programs are:

- What do you want the instruction program to be able to do? What does it do when it meets student needs or support student learning?
- How will you determine if you have achieved your outcomes? What will success look like?
- What can you learn from the evidence/data?
- What is the plan for change?

The most intuitive and dynamic approach of addressing learning outcomes came from faculty member Randy Hensley who believes that great teaching drives program development. Hensley spoke often and passionately that any vision for improving pedagogy has to take into consideration the concept of the authentic teacher and how that notion may be slightly unique from teacher to teacher. Definitions of authentic teaching have some of the following components:

- Good teaching cannot be reduced to a technique
- Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness
- Teaching is an exercise in vulnerability
- Identity and integrity are at the core of good teaching
- Use techniques to reveal not conceal personhood
- Mentorship
- Connect with the inward, living core of our students
- Finding the teacher within

ACRL Institute for Information Literacy - Illinois Immersion 2007

July 13-18, Illinois State University Normal, IL.

Hosted by CARLI with support of the Illinois State Library

Hensley then linked authentic teaching into the development of Information Literacy programs:

“A programmatic process of pedagogical improvement has to engage a process of what it means for each teacher to be authentic. That authenticity is basic to developing teaching methods that work. So, addressing the improvement of teaching methods is less about: "this method works" and more about: "which methods work for "us", why do they work, and how do we know they work?”

“And suddenly we are back at assessment.”

Now my assessment of the Immersion experience is an unfinished symphony of ideas, personalities, and possibilities. Although the faculty who taught and guided us were encouraging and brilliant, and the subject content explored timely and thought provoking, perhaps the greatest impact Immersion will have on me is yet to be realized due to the reflective nature of post-Immersion and the patience needed to create a curriculum-wide Information Literacy Program. But ultimately I realize Information Literacy concepts must become an innate, organic part of student learning in the 21st century and to further this vision programs need to be modeled around authentic teaching that is outcomes based, assessing both student learning and teaching methods.