

LOEX 2007
Uncharted Waters: Tapping the Depths of our Community to Enhance Learning
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LOEX 2007, as a whole, proved to be the most enlightening LOEX conference I have attended. The organizers made a point of bringing in speakers from outside the library world, which was a refreshing change. A plenary speaker, plenary panel and eight breakout sessions made for an enriching experience.

Pat Wolfe, Ed.D., opened the conference with a discussion of “Brain Research and Education: The Vital Connection.” Dr. Wolfe referred to traditional education as “educational bulimia,” where students are asked to suck up facts and regurgitate them. Subjects are studied in isolation from the context in which they will be used. This practice is contrary to what Wolfe feels the educator’s mission should be: “Our job is not to help students do well in school, but to help them do well in life.” To support her belief, she quotes Howard Gardner, who states that the majority of our best students cannot apply what they’ve learned when faced with new unanticipated situations.

Wolfe advocates moving away from the intuition-based “folklore profession” of traditional education and toward a science-based profession that understands the structure and function of the brain. Based on brain imaging studies which have identified which parts of the brain control various functions, Wolfe suggests four findings that should lead us to new and better ways of teaching:

1. *Experience sculpts the brain.* This “use it or lose it” finding supports the theory that only those synapses which regularly carry traffic will flourish, while those that are not used will die away. It is from this finding that Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences defines good educational practice.
2. *The brain seeks meaningful patterns.* This tetris theory of education states that the brain must fit every new piece of information into an existing and connected category, or it will be lost. The effective teacher will either find an experience to which students can hook the new information or create that experience with them.
3. *There are two distinct types of memory.* 98% of brain function is made up of procedural memory, those skills and habits we perform automatically and unconsciously. The remaining 2%, our general knowledge and life experiences, make up our declarative memory. This is the learning that does not respond well to rote memorization, but cries out for active learning: metaphor and analogy, problem-based learning, hands-on activities, reciprocal and peer teaching, visuals and graphics, simulations, etc.
4. *Emotions are a primary catalyst in the learning process.* Positive emotions generated by pleasant experiences enhance learning. Negative emotions, such as fear, impede learning. This theory relates directly to issues of school safety.

I was particularly interested in Wolfe's rather harsh assessment of online learning. She says our brain is hard-wired for social learning. Online learning isolates the brain from the social interaction it craves, which can only adequately be met through face-to-face teaching.

Pat Wolfe is the author of *Brain Matters: Translating Research into Classroom Practice*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001.

Plenary Panel: "Through the Lens of the Course Instructor"

Moderated by Katy French, Assistant Professor/Librarian, this panel of four faculty members (management, communications, and educational leadership) from three different institutions described how they teach information literacy concepts in their classrooms, as well as taking their classes to the library for instruction. The activities they described may already be taking place in some of our classrooms, and certainly provide ideas we could market to our own faculty.

Prior to Instruction:

1. Many textbooks contain a chapter on information research. Ask the professor, and if this is the case, review the chapter prior to planning your instruction session.
2. A topic development worksheet completed prior to instruction prepares students to better utilize their time in the instruction session.
3. Either included in the above worksheet, or as a separate exercise, students who brainstorm search terms prior to instruction are better prepared for instruction.
4. Offering points toward their grade or extra credit points motivates students to attend the instruction session.

Following Instruction:

5. Requiring students to submit a list of citations located during instruction motivates them to pay attention.
6. Further reinforcement can come from using the above citations in a classroom session on citation style.
7. An assignment to use a specified database to find a prescribed number of sources during instruction forces students out of their comfort zone, requiring them to learn a new database.

Panelists' Suggestions for Getting Faculty On Board:

8. Become a part of your campus Center for Teaching and Learning. Offer informational sessions with an incentive: recognition, examples of student work before and after instruction, faculty mentoring, release time, or free food.
9. Target faculty who already require research by showing them what you could do to improve their students' work.
10. "Act as if" information literacy instruction is the norm.

Conclusion: The perspectives offered by all of the plenary speakers served to enhance my appreciation of the eight breakout sessions I attended:

1. Keeping Up With the YouTube Generation: Collaborating with Student Video Bloggers to Enhance Library Instruction – how one library capitalized on the skills of an undergraduate blogger to create an information literacy video.
2. Taking Immersion Home – librarians at Seattle community colleges recreate their Immersion experiences for faculty, who in turn incorporated information literacy concepts into their curricula.
3. Building Campus-wide Information Literacy Programs - describes how two universities incorporated information literacy student learning outcomes into required Gen. Ed. Programs.
4. Crossing Boundaries: Facing the Challenges of Library Instruction and Research from Evolving Interdisciplinary Topics – addressed ways of helping students to access information across disciplines.
5. Library Instruction on the Go: Podcasting at the Kresge Library – demonstration of how substantial sound and visual bites of information are provided on-demand using podcasting technology.
6. From Guest Lecturer to Assignment Consultant: Exploring New Roles for the Teaching Librarian and Alternative Models of Information Literacy Integration – report of a Mellon funded project to expand traditional library instruction by providing consultancy in designing information literacy rich classroom assignments.
7. Teaching in a Tea House – report of a survey conducted of all California libraries attempting to determine what, if any, sequential information literacy instruction is taking place across library types.
8. Instruction 2.0: Teaching and/or Incorporating Web 2.0 Technologies in Your Classroom – a discussion of how attendees are using blogs, wikis, RSS, Second Life and Facebook in library instruction.

All in all, this was an information rich conference from which I gained many new ideas for enhancing our information literacy program.