

Transforming Information Literacy Instruction Using Learner-Centered Teaching

Joan R. Kaplowitz

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Foreword

Let the main object of this, our didactic, be as follows: To seek and to find a method of instruction, by which teachers may teach less, but learners may learn more.

—Comenius, *The Great Didactic*, 1649

Transforming Information Literacy Instruction Using Learner-Centered Teaching challenges readers to consider how they can commit to Comenius's philosophy. Identifying three central principles of learner-centered teaching (LCT) in the preface as "collaboration, participation, and [a] shared responsibility for learning between teachers and learners and among learners themselves," Joan Kaplowitz presents logical ways in which librarians can work to transform their teaching. The book provides readers with critical information on LCT theory, examples of strategies that can be applied in different modes of instruction, and case study vignettes authored by practitioners that exemplify LCT best practices.

Kaplowitz's *Transforming Information Literacy Instruction Using Learner-Centered Teaching* provides a much-needed voice of reason at a critical point in time for information literacy instruction (ILI) programming and libraries. Attention is shifting away from a focus on teaching methods and the value of information literacy programming within librarianship. Many within library and higher education administrative circles are more eager to focus on evolving technologies (e-book readers, Web 2.0, discovery systems, and mobile devices) at the expense of also nurturing ILI programming. Understandably, libraries need to position themselves for maximum relevancy in the coming decades. However, within higher education the status of the "librarian as teacher" has never faced more critical challenges. Librarians are now not only teaching within traditional face-to-face environments but also grappling with how to offer new and effective instructional approaches within the burgeoning frontiers of online, hybrid, and embedded modes of instruction.

We face a clear and present danger in devaluing the need for the professional development and pedagogical improvement of the librarian as teacher at a

time when we must progress more than ever to remain vital in the emerging digital instructional landscape. The need for LCT approaches is a critical one. How we reinvigorate our collective instructional mission in the remainder of this decade will greatly impact the future of libraries and the value placed on librarians.

This book dynamically motivates and empowers instruction librarians to embrace an LCT perspective that provides a pivotal foundation for the improvement of both traditional face-to-face instruction and the teaching that takes place via embedded, online, or hybrid learning environments. Instruction librarians will not remain central to campus life if we are not able to effectively move away from a traditional lecture style that relies on the “sage on the stage” approach. While this has been mentioned before within the library literature, this book is the only monograph I know of to take such a specialized focus on improving ILI and generalized teaching through an LCT perspective. Chapter 8 of this book begins with a quote from Winston Churchill—“Things do not get better by being left alone”—and in my view this is a central message of this book that readers need to take to heart. ILI instruction will not improve—no form of instruction will—if there is not change and particularly change that puts the learner/student at the center of attention. Our profession desperately needs change agents to transform our approach to library instruction, and, not surprisingly, Joan Kaplowitz has once again emerged as a trusted voice with valuable information to share with peers.

When it comes to studying critical connections between information literacy instruction and learning theory within the field of librarianship, there are few who I trust more than Joan Kaplowitz. I was first introduced to the transformative nature of Joan’s teaching style during my graduate school training at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1998. Joan was a guest lecturer in my information literacy course that was taught by her colleague and well-known coauthor, Esther Grassian. Joan has a Doctorate in Psychology, and, after listening to her for just an hour, I knew that I was extremely fortunate to be her student. Not only could she adroitly explain why learning theory mattered when trying to engage students, she also wanted to know how we, her students for just one day, liked to learn and why we wanted to teach. It was clear that Joan was open to being a mentor and colleague to anyone who was interested enough to join her in her lifetime journey of working hard to become a better teacher. Joan has gone on to reach so many through her writings, presentations, and role as faculty member in the Association of College and Research Libraries Immersion Program. She is a dynamic teacher who takes risks and embraces change. Anyone who has ever heard Joan speak knows that she believes that it is imperative that one “share the responsibility of learning with

your learners.” She definitely continues to practice what she preaches—and this book is yet another example of why so many within our field continue to view Joan as a mentor and leader.

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Preface

How many times have you taught what you thought was a very successful information literacy instruction (ILI) session filled with relevant examples, well-constructed exercises, and all the information that your learners should need to address their information needs, only to encounter these learners at a later date and find that they seem to have gained next to nothing from your time with them? If you are anything like me, this prompts you to return to the drawing board and begin to tinker and tweak your materials in the seemingly unending quest to improve your endeavors.

After many years of searching for a better way of working with my learners, I came upon the concept of learner-centered teaching (LCT), which I immediately felt had enormous potential for those of us who are involved in ILI. *Transforming Information Literacy Instruction Using Learner-Centered Teaching* shares my discoveries in this area with you.

The pages that follow cover the evolution of LCT, explore its historical roots, and present the research evidence from education, psychology, and the neurosciences that supports the principles associated with it. Building on that foundation, the book then goes on to show how LCT can be applied to ILI, offers the reasons why doing so can improve the effectiveness of ILI endeavors, and provides examples of how ILI librarians can transform their practice.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I, “Finding Out about Learner-Centered Teaching,” offers background information about LCT. Chapter 1 covers what is meant by the term LCT and introduces the three principles of this philosophy—Collaboration, Participation, and shared Responsibility for learning among all participants, teachers, and learners alike, which is referred to in the book as the CPR perspective for teaching. Chapter 2 looks at the characteristics of LCT and discusses how being learner-centered helps ILI librarians listen to, engage, and inspire their learners. Chapter 3 examines the historical and research-based roots of LCT and offers further support for the effectiveness of this teaching philosophy.

The chapters in Part II, “Planning for Learner-Centered Teaching,” look at teaching and assessment methodology through the LCT lens. Chapter 4 examines

a variety of instructional methods from an LCT perspective and includes practical examples of how to incorporate these methods into ILI. Chapter 5 deals with assessment issues and offers suggestions to help ILI librarians ensure that the methods used to measure the effectiveness of their instructional endeavors also have a learner-centered point of view.

Part III, “Applying Learner-Centered Teaching in Practice,” offers a practical look at how LCT principles can be implemented in face-to-face (Chapter 6) and online (Chapter 7) formats. Both chapters include the advantages and drawbacks of using each mode of delivery and show how applying LCT principles can maximize the advantages while compensating for the drawbacks of each type of instructional format. Chapter 8 discusses how to combine the two formats using a blended or hybrid delivery mode and describes a case study in which an entirely face-to-face course was transformed into one that uses a blended format. The good, the not so good, and the (sometimes) ugly aspects of the transformational process are addressed as well as lessons learned and plans for the future. The section ends with Chapter 9 wherein real-life librarians from all types of libraries share their experiences and LCT ideas in a series of vignettes.

Finally, Part IV, “Summing It All Up,” offers suggestions for how to take everything covered in the book and begin to use it to transform the reader’s own ILI practice. Chapter 10 sums up all the preceding material as well as discusses how the reader can begin to transition into using a more LCT approach. Some thoughts on the future and the continued impact of technology are also included in this final chapter.

Transforming Information Literacy Instruction Using Learner-Centered Teaching is dedicated to the idea that the principles of LCT can be applied in all types of ILI and in any kind of library (academic, public, school, and special). It is intended to be useful to anyone interested in ILI, whether they are students in a formal graduate library science program or working professionals who wish to improve and/or update their ILI teaching skills.

All good teachers know that learning to teach is a journey and not a destination. We are all in search of a “better way” to engage and inspire our learners. And we are never completely satisfied with our instructional endeavors—always suspecting that a better way to go is lurking just out of our reach. If we are very lucky, we catch a glimpse of that “better way” during a conference, while attending a workshop, as we watch our colleagues teach, and as we scan relevant literature. Sometimes one of these experiences can completely transform us. I had just such an experience when I came upon Maryellen Weimer’s 2003 *Change* article on what she referred to as “learner-centered teaching.” It was one of those “aha” moments when suddenly everything made complete sense. I felt that this was the approach I had been moving toward for many years but could not completely articulate on my own. Ms. Weimer’s words (and others like her) inspired me to

explore what LCT really meant and to see in what ways these ideas could be applied to ILI.

I learned that when moving to an LCT approach the most important step to take is the first one—that of turning the focus around and thinking about everything from the learner’s perspective. Learner-centered teachers do not talk about what they are going to teach. They address what their learners will be learning. A learner-centered teacher’s job is to create opportunities for people to learn. Learner-centered teachers are no longer desperate to “cover” as many topics as they can during their instructional sessions. Instead their task becomes addressing material in ways that engage learners, allow learners to apply what they learned, and help learners retain that material long after they leave us. Learner-centered teachers do not lead, they facilitate. They do not talk at learners, but rather with them. Learner-centered teachers guide learners as they find solutions to their specific information needs.

The principles of LCT fit in perfectly with the goals of ILI—especially in terms of creating lifelong learners. It is my hope that you will find the discussion of LCT included in this book as inspiring as I did and may even have your own “aha” experience as you read how LCT can favorably impact ILI practice. Whether you decide to completely transform your instructional approach, or prefer to start a bit smaller by just incorporating some LCT ideas into your current endeavors, I hope that *Transforming Information Literacy Instruction Using Learner-Centered Teaching* offers you the support, encouragement, and confidence to continue on your journey to becoming more effective information literacy instructors.

About the Author

Joan R. Kaplowitz has a Doctorate in Psychology as well as a Master of Library Science degree. She retired in 2007 after 23 years as a librarian at UCLA. Dr. Kaplowitz worked at UCLA since graduating from UCLA's Library and Information Science program in 1984. She began her career as a reference/instruction librarian and later Educational Services Coordinator and Head of Public Services at the Education and Psychology Library. She ended her UCLA Library career as the Head of the Research, Instruction and Collection Services division at the UCLA Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library in June 2007.

Dr. Kaplowitz was heavily involved in information literacy instruction at the local, state, and national levels for her entire career and continues to be active in this area despite her retirement from the UCLA library system. During her early years at UCLA she taught several sections of UCLA's undergraduate course "Library and Information Resources." In 1989 she collaborated with UCLA's Esther Grassian to propose and develop the UCLA graduate library program's course "Information Literacy Instruction: Theory and Technique." She and Ms. Grassian have alternated presenting this course since 1990, and Dr. Kaplowitz is continuing to teach this course despite her retirement from the library. Dr. Kaplowitz was also part of the faculty development team for Association of College and Research Libraries' Institute for Information Literacy's Immersion Program and taught in six of the programs between 1999 and 2004.

Dr. Kaplowitz was awarded several Librarians' Association of the University of California research grants in support of her research and publication endeavors. She held office in the American Library Association's New Members Round Table and the California Clearinghouse on Library Instruction (now known as SCIL or the Southern California Instruction Librarians group). Dr. Kaplowitz was also involved with the American Library Association's Committee on Accreditation and served on several ad hoc teams reviewing ALA accreditation for several graduate library programs.

From 2001 to 2003, Dr. Kaplowitz was a member of the UCLA Library's Information Literacy Initiative's steering committee and remained on that body when

the Initiative became a full-fledged program. She remained involved until her retirement in 2007.

Dr. Kaplowitz has published and made numerous presentations on various topics such as the psychology of learning and cognitive styles, assessment in information literacy, student-centered learning, and mentoring within the profession. She is the coauthor (with Ms. Grassian) of *Information Literacy Instruction: Theory and Practice*. The first edition of this book, which was published in 2001, received the ACRL Instruction Section's Publication of the Year award. The second edition of this book was published in 2009. They also coauthored *Learning to Lead and Manage Information Literacy Instruction* (2005).

Dr. Kaplowitz and Ms. Grassian wrote the Information Literacy Instruction section for the current edition of the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (2010). In addition, Dr. Kaplowitz contributed the Psychology of Learning chapter to the 2008 *Information Literacy Handbook* published by the Instruction Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries. Since her retirement Dr. Kaplowitz has been offering single-day workshops in the areas of active learning, assessment, expected learning outcomes, instructional planning, and learner-centered teaching at various university and college campuses in California. Most recently she was invited to teach her information literacy instruction course for the University of Texas's distance program for information studies students in southern California and offered her course to the program's first cohort in spring 2011.