Transforming Information Literacy Instruction Using Learner-Centered Teaching

Joan R. Kaplowitz
# Contents

List of Illustrations ................................................................. ix  
Foreword  
   *Lynn D. Lampert* .......................................................... xi  
Preface ....................................................................................... xv  
Acknowledgments ................................................................. xviii  

**Part I: Finding Out about Learner-Centered Teaching**

Chapter 1. What Is Learner-Centered Teaching? ................................ 3  
   The Adventure Begins ....................................................... 3  
   What’s So Special about LCT? ............................................ 4  
   Learner-Centered Teaching: CPR for Your Practice ................. 5  
   Support for LCT .............................................................. 6  
   Shifting the Balance of Power ........................................... 7  
   LCT and ILI .................................................................. 10  
   Final Remarks .................................................................. 11  
   Reflections ...................................................................... 11  
   Explorations .................................................................. 12  
   References ...................................................................... 13  

Chapter 2. How Will You Know Learner-Centered Teaching When You See It? .............................................. 17  
   I’ll Know It When I See It ................................................. 17  
   Components of LCT ........................................................ 18  
   Listen to Your Learners .................................................... 19  
   Engage Your Learners ..................................................... 25  
   Inspire Your Learners ...................................................... 27  
   Final Remarks .................................................................. 32  
   Reflections ...................................................................... 32  
   Explorations .................................................................. 34  
   References ...................................................................... 34
Chapter 3. Where Did Learner-Centered Teaching Come From? 37
   The Evolution of an Idea 37
   John Dewey and the Progressive Education Movement 38
   How Psychological Learning Theories Contribute to LCT 39
   Common Threads—Collaboration, Participation, Responsibility 42
   CPR from the Teacher’s Perspective: Listen, Engage, Inspire 43
   LCT: The Research Base 45
   Final Remarks 51
   Reflections 51
   Explorations 52
   References 53

Part II: Planning for Learner-Centered Teaching

Chapter 4. What Will Learners Do?—Learner-Centered Teaching Methods 61
   How Do I Teach? Let Me Count the Ways 61
   The Many Flavors of Learning 62
   The Lecture Method 64
   Modeling/Demonstration 70
   Questioning 71
   Discussion 73
   Practice 77
   Collaborative Group Work 78
   Reflection 87
   A Word about Discovery 89
   Ending It All 90
   Mixing It Up 92
   Final Remarks 95
   Reflections 94
   Explorations 94
   References 96

Chapter 5. How Will Learning Be Measured?—Learner-Centered Assessment 101
   Taking the Guesswork Out of Learner-Centered Teaching, or
   How Do I Know It Worked? 101
   Using Learner-Centered Assessment to Listen, Engage, and Inspire 101
   Learner-Centered Assessment: Creating Opportunities to Collaborate, Participate, and Take Responsibility 103
   Planning for Learner-Centered Assessment: The Teaching Tripod 106
   Teaching Tripod—Step One: Creating Expected Learning Outcomes 107
   Teaching Tripod—Step Two: Selecting Instructional Activities 109
Teaching Tripod—Step Three: Assessing Expected Learning

Outcomes 110
Assessment 101: An Overview of Some Basic Principles 111
Double Duty: Using Instructional Activities for ILI Assessment 119
Final Remarks 119
Reflections 121
Explorations 122
References 124

Part III: Applying Learner-Centered Teaching in Practice

Chapter 6. Creating the Face-to-Face Learner-Centered Experience 129
Advantages and Drawbacks of the F2F Format 130
Atmosphere—Creating an LCT Environment 132
How to Build a Learner-Centered F2F Experience 135
Special Considerations for the Learner-Centered F2F Experience 141
Final Remarks 144
Reflections 144
Explorations 145
References 147

Chapter 7. Creating the Online Learner-Centered Experience 149
With Hillary Kaplowitz
Why Teach Online? 149
Moving to the Online Format: A Cautionary Tale 150
Advantages and Drawbacks of the Online Format 151
How Online Instruction Supports LCT 157
Special Challenges for LCT in the Online Format 158
Atmosphere—Designing an LCT Environment Online 159
How to Build a Learner-Centered Online Experience 164
Elements of Learner-Centered Online Instruction 168
Special Considerations for the Learner-Centered Online Experience 169
Final Remarks 172
Reflections 173
Explorations 174
References 175

Chapter 8. Creating the Blended Learner-Centered Experience—
A Case Study in Transformation 179
With Hillary Kaplowitz
Changing My Ways 180
The Starting Point 182
Moving to the LCT/Blended Approach—The Transformation of IS 448 184
## List of Illustrations

### TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.1</td>
<td>Talking the Talk: The Language of LCT</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1</td>
<td>Traditional versus LC Teaching</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.2</td>
<td>Teaching Characteristics Self-Assessment</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Connecting Theory to Practice: Who Said It?</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Learning Styles Characteristics</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>The Lecture Method</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>The Modeling/Demonstration Method</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.4</td>
<td>The Questioning Method</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.5</td>
<td>The Discussion Method</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.6</td>
<td>The Practice Method</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.7</td>
<td>The Collaborative Group Work Method</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.8</td>
<td>The Reflection Method</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.1</td>
<td>An Interpretation of Kirkpatrick’s Levels of Assessment</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.2</td>
<td>Categorizing Assessment Tools</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.3</td>
<td>The Control/Relevance Continuum</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.4</td>
<td>Using Instructional Activities for Assessment</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.1</td>
<td>Advantages and Drawbacks of the F2F Format</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7.1</td>
<td>Advantages and Drawbacks of the Online Format</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8.1</td>
<td>Face-to-Face Session 1</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8.2</td>
<td>Face-to-Face Session 2</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8.3</td>
<td>Face-to-Face Session 3</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURES

Figure 9.1  Handout from Vignette 6—Making It Fun  
Figure 9.2  Handout from Vignette 13—Taking Responsibility
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 transforma-
tive 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
cowriter, Esther Grassian. Joan has a Doctorate in Psychology, and, after lis-
tening 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, presenta-
tions, 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.
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.