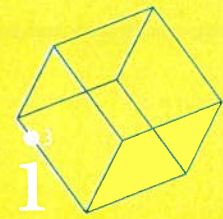


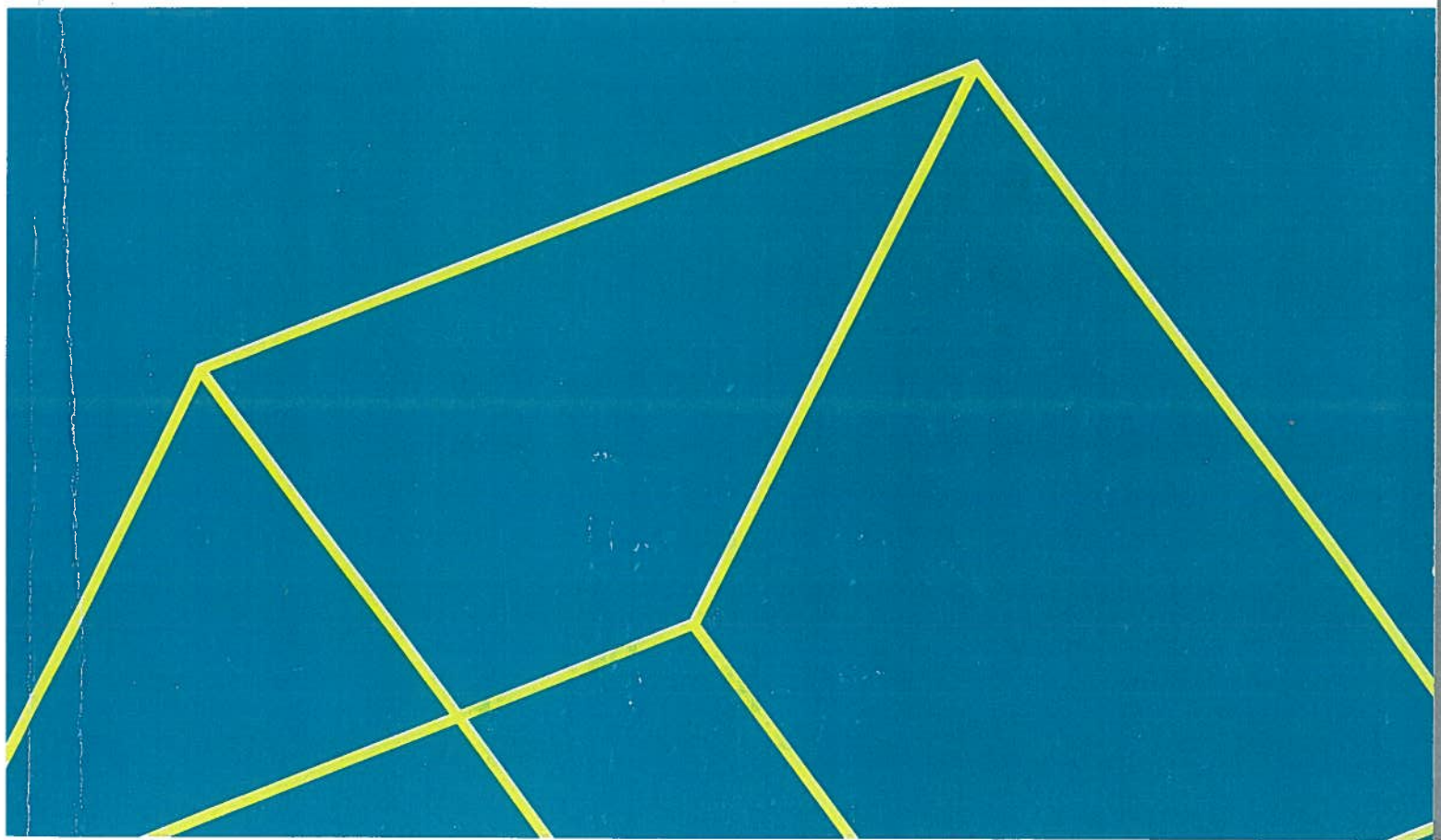
information: interactions and impact



# Conference Abstracts

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**Chasing the ephemeral: Studying librarians' in-the-moment experiences performing information literacy instruction**

From a librarian's point of view, what are the reactions, impressions, perceptions, and choices that shape information literacy instruction as it occurs? The research reported in this paper explores this question. In addition, this paper will also discuss methodological considerations related to documenting face-to-face instruction, which is as ephemeral and subjective as any performance in the theatre or arena. This abstract will contextualise the researcher's multi-method qualitative study and further describe its procedure and initial findings.

Today, information literacy itself is rightly understood as bound to the sociocultural and technological contexts in which it is fostered and enacted (Lloyd 2012, Sundin 2008, Tuominen et al. 2005). However, information literacy instruction, purportedly a key activity in the encouragement of information literacy, has generally not been understood in a parallel fashion: that is, as a complex, specific, context-bound event, a potentially sophisticated act of influence by librarians.

Rather, much of the practitioner-oriented information literacy literature reflects different predominant assumptions. For example, many authors assert that new and plentiful information technology is the key to creating significant information literacy learning experiences (Hoffman and Polkinghorne 2010; 2009). Some practitioners also equate teaching with entertaining; for example, a recent conference presentation recommended that librarians understand how to "incorporate skills developed from stand-up and improve comedy to turn instruction sessions into entertaining workshops that keep student attention" (Mason 2009).

The above discourses suggest a more complex discomfort with information literacy instruction than is likely to be improved solely with tips, tricks, and the latest technology. Indeed, librarians often express apprehension both about their relationships with teaching faculty (Julien and Given 2003; Julien and Pecoskie 2009) and also about their readiness to teach at all (Elmborg 2006, 192). Recent research speaks to the implications of this apprehension; instructional effectiveness is "threatened when those providing information literacy instruction are not fully engaged in their teaching roles" (Julien and Pecoski 2009, 149). All of these findings suggest a need for a richer understanding of face-to-face information literacy instruction in order to support librarians' understanding of, and engagement with, their teaching practices.

The study presented in this paper has been implemented in two phases over the past year. The first phase was autoethnographic (Polkinghorne 2012). The second phase, directly informed by the first, involves a reflective procedure in which nine academic librarians from the researcher's metropolitan area are currently participating. This paper will be the first opportunity for the study to be presented and discussed as a whole. Although its relatively small size, like that of many qualitative studies, will not enable validation of widely generalisable claims, this study has utilised a procedure for documenting and reflecting upon information literacy instruction that has, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, never before been undertaken.

The first phase was an autoethnography of the researcher's own instructional practice. While reflective praxis has received attention in library and information studies (Jacobs 2009), autoethnography has seen very little application in the field (c.f. Michels 2010 for a rare example). Autoethnography was selected here because it enabled the researcher to capitalise on her position as a librarian conducting diverse and intensive information literacy instruction. The researcher is a "complete member in the social world under study," with full participatory access

to it (Anderson 2006, 379). While studying something as subjective as information literacy instruction, it seemed logical to begin by attempting to understand one's own instruction, along with the challenges presented by attempting to understand.

The autoethnographic data were journal entries written by the researcher after each instruction session in the first four months of 2012. Many autoethnographies are undertaken by freely considering the researcher's "thoughts, feelings, and emotions" about a phenomenon (Ellis and Bochner 2000, 737). However, in this case, in order to enhance the rigor of the work, the researcher designed a framework for reflection, drawing concepts such as performances, stages, and impression management from Erving Goffman's sociological dramaturgy (1959). Goffman's concepts provided a means by which to reflectively scan each teaching experience and the choices comprising every instructional performance.

Aspects of Goffman's sociological dramaturgy have supported explorations of service desk transactions (Chelton 1997), librarians' experiences of the teaching role (Julien and Pecoskie 2009), and academic librarianship in general (Quinn 2005). For the purposes of this study, Goffman must be acknowledged as a structuralist; it is important to note that his framework has not been utilised here to reduce face-to-face instruction to a sole unifying model. Rather, Goffman's concepts have been harnessed to create a way to explore librarians' own unique subjective choices within the act of teaching.

The journals created during the autoethnography were combed for patterns and the resulting observations were illuminating. For example, what Goffman calls "defining the situation" — effort expended to encourage the success of an interaction by ensuring that all participants possess a shared understanding of that interaction — is clearly predominant within the researcher's own information literacy pedagogy (Polkinghorne 2012). This was an observation to which the researcher would not have had access had she not undertaken a structured journaling process. In this way, the autoethnography provided important information to the development of the interview and reflection guides for the second phase.

The second phase involves a three-part procedure. In early 2013, each participating librarian sat for a semi-structured interview, describing her/his background, feelings, perceptions, habits, and strategies in relation to information literacy instruction. The current step has participants keeping structured journals in concert with their instructional work. Participants were selected because they had not previously been in the habit of keeping a teaching journal. The third phase will occur at the end of the current academic term, in late March, when each participant will read her/his interview transcript and comment on whether and how it still rings true. By implementing this procedure, the researcher will examine participants' face-to-face instruction as well reflection's possible impacts upon them. Multi-method approaches employing interviews and journals have been utilised to explore library instruction (c.f. Julien and Genuis 2011). However, so far as the researcher is aware, no extant research has utilised the procedure described here.

Findings from this second phase are not yet available, but findings from the interviews alone appear to endorse the viability of the reflective procedure that has been implemented. That is, in-the-moment choices do significantly influence how participants understand their own teaching, even among those who do not consider themselves reflective. Much more complete findings will be presented at the conference, once participants' interview and journal data have been coded and analysed. Overall, it is hoped that this study will contribute to a richer understanding of face-to-face information literacy instruction, and encourage appreciation of the complexity, ephemerality, and subjectivity of instructional work.

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