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ACL 2017 Conference Unconference Session on Information Literacy



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ABSTRACT

This article describes an unconference session at the most recent Association of Christian Librarians Annual Conference 2017. The session attendees worked together to produce sample lesson plans, using the “backwards design planning structure” introduced by Wiggins & McTighe in *Understanding by Design*. Conference attendees produced information literacy lesson plans to introduce freshman college students to five of the ACRL Framework concepts

ACL 2017 Unconference Session on Information Literacy

The first time the Association of Christian Librarians (ACL) ever offered “unconference” sessions was during the 2017 Annual Conference. What is an unconference? The unconference concept is so new, the Oxford English Dictionary does not have the term listed. Wikipedia (2017) claims “Unconferences typically feature open discussions ... This form of conference is particularly useful when the attendees generally have a high level of expertise or knowledge in the field.” This definition fits the ACL conference attendees, they know their profession.

Few librarians had ever participated in an unconference. This left the structure of the session open to much experimentation. As one of the uninitiated unconference coordinators, I consulted with a fellow faculty librarian, Vanessa Garafalo, who had attended an unconference. Garafalo’s recommendations were to provide a

comfortable warm-up for people who might not know each other, keep the participants active, be creative, and make it fun. Using that “rigid prescription,” I set about planning for the unconference session.

The ACL 2017 unconference sessions offered a unique opportunity for collaboration. Using the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Frameworks, I directed the librarians to work together to produce unique and creative lesson plans. The session members divided into five groups. Each group chose one concept of the Framework on which to base their lesson plan. I asked them to use the *Understanding by Design* “backwards design planning structure” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), that is, begin by deciding on the goal of the class. Decide what the students need to learn or understand. After the planners have a goal, they will decide how to assess the learning. Then each group will determine a method of imparting the information.

I developed this session using the *Understanding by Design* process in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of Wiggins and McTighe’s curriculum design process. The goal of this lesson was for each librarian to gain confidence in their ability to produce an outstanding lesson based on one Framework concept. Librarians with no Framework experience would contribute their teaching knowledge and skills, while session members who had explored Framework concepts could mentor their group’s progress and encourage innovation.

I chose to assess each group’s progress using the following criteria: the notes produced during their discussion, an infographic showing the three teaching steps of the group’s plan, and a presentation by two members of each Framework discussion, sharing their lesson plan with all the other session attendees.

The teaching method for the unconference session included a short introduction to the process of producing a lesson plan, note-taking during group decisions and discussions, working together to produce an infographic, and a presentation of the lesson plan by two representatives of each group. Sarah Copeland created the instructional infographic below, which shows the process.



Figure 1: Session Plan (infographic designed by Sarah Copeland)

What follows is the work of each group. The insights, the creative assessments, and the methods of lesson delivery provided by each group will encourage other librarians in their Framework lesson planning.

Searching as Strategic Exploration

This group wanted students to understand the advantage of using a variety of internet resources and databases in their research. The learning activity required using the same search terms in different databases. Discussion members hoped the wide range of results would elicit “Ah-ha!” moments for students.

Teachers would assess the lesson using a five question survey at the end of the class period. The questions might be similar to:

- What resource did you find helpful?
- What do you still want to know?
- How would you rate your experience?
- How many “good” articles did you find on 2 pages?

Instructors provide a screen share exercise, then direct individual student searching. The exercise will use randomly distributed topics. Students should use Google to help them identify initial search terms that they will later use to explore each of the electronic resources.

The infographic shows:

1. emoticons depicting students' experiences as they strategically attempt to identify the most useful resources for their topic
2. a sample questionnaire to be used as assessment
3. student discussion of possible search terms for the shared searching experience
4. computers for individual searching.

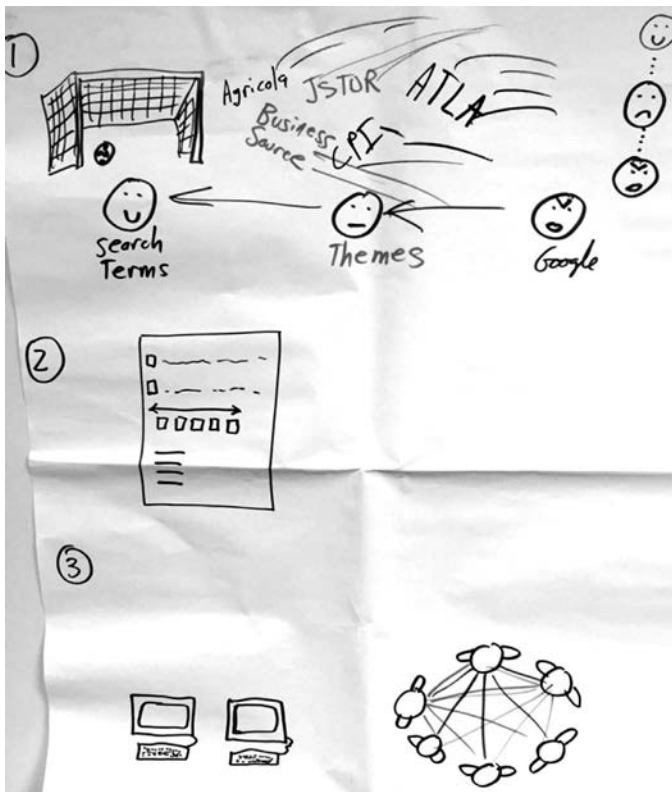


Figure 2: Poster illustrating lesson planning for Framework concept Searching as Strategic Exploration

Research as Inquiry

The librarians in this group focused on the practical goal of helping the students develop a good research question. They wanted the students to experience the many different paths of research that are possible within a specific theme or subject.

For the lesson assessment, the students will submit their “research questions” along with a simple count of articles and books that they found while exploring their questions.

The method of instruction will be an activity. The teacher assigns one topic, for example: gun control. The class, in smaller working groups, create appropriate research questions. The students do some preliminary searching to expose resources for a paper. The groups share their questions and results with the class at the end of the exercise.

The infographic shows the lesson goal of students producing good research questions. The assessment states that the groups will submit their question along with three results of their search. The method of instruction illustrates the divergent directions student groups could take to arrive at great research questions, the process of student group discussion and sharing. There is also a cleverly rendered example topic.

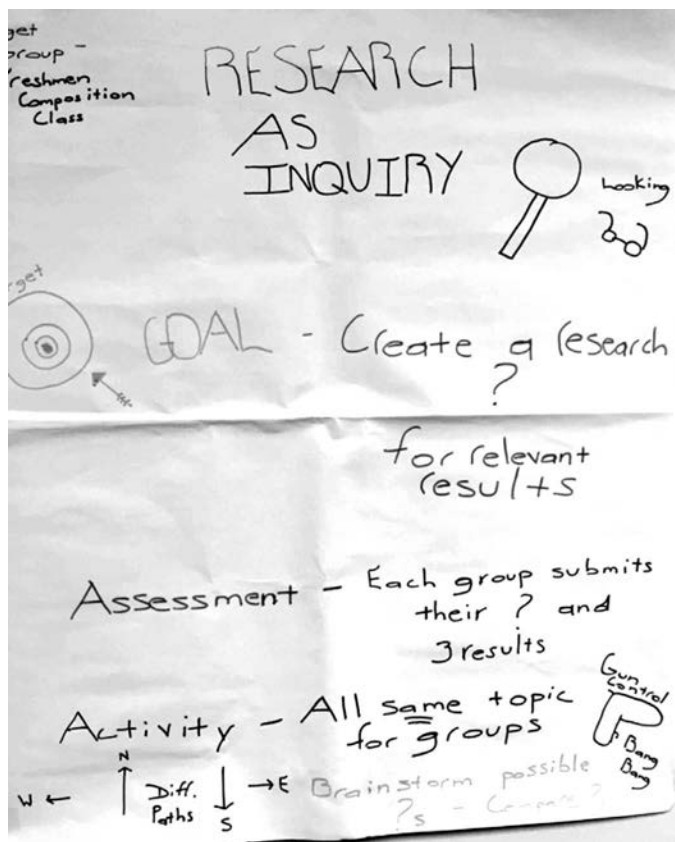


Figure 3: Poster illustrating lesson planning for ACRL Framework concept Research as Inquiry

Authority is Constructed and Contextual

Many of the members of this group attended the ACL conference session presented by ACL president, Denise Nelson (2017). Nelson (2017) pointed out that many freshmen equate the term “authority” with power, rather than understanding authority as also being a quality related to credibility. The goal of this class is for freshmen to be aware of the context of their resource. The context consists of the credentials of the author to speak on this particular topic, the reliability of the publisher of this type of information, plus the credibility of the supporting authors and materials within the resource. The students will learn to weigh credibility in terms of this context.

In order to determine the degree of student understanding, each group of students will select three sources. The closer the students come to identifying “credible”, “not credible”, and “possibly credible” sources will indicate how deeply they understand the critical thinking involved in choosing appropriate sources for their writing. For the most part, the past emphasis on choosing sources from restricted library databases, has not helped students develop the evaluative skills needed in today’s dynamic information ecosystem.

The method of instruction will be a class discussion of *fake news*. Students will explore what they understand when they hear and use the term *fake news* and how *fake news* might have impacted them in a personal way. After the discussion, the students will divide into working groups. Each group will have a topic and the task of finding three sources on their topic from different types of media.

The infographic shows the goal of the class, as a discussion of *fake news*. This group wants their students to be aware of and be able to talk about *fake news* in their information culture. The infographic also shows the assessment by the students of the three sources, one each for real news, fake news, and questionable reliability of a news source. The method of instruction will include the discussion and the group work of finding resources.

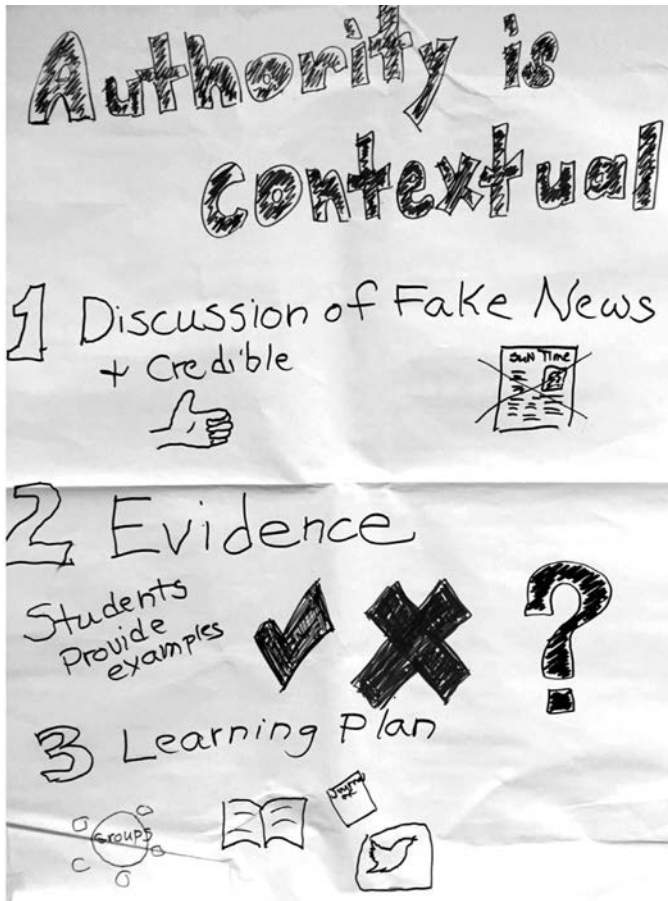


Figure 4: Poster illustrating lesson planning for ACRL Framework concept Authority is Constructed and Contextual

Scholarship as Conversation

In the attempt to help students see their research as part of a scholarly conversation, this group wants their students to identify participants in the conversation. They also wanted their students to understand the basic content of the material they were sourcing. These conference participants recognized the practice of some freshmen to find quotations that sound good, regardless of the resource author's intent and meaning for the article as a whole. These planners want their students to focus on finding supporting research for their topics rather than looking for nice sounding quotations.

Teachers will evaluate student learning by requiring students to produce an assignment which will be assessed using an evaluation rubric. The students will meet both goals of the lesson when they can identify the author as speaker and can explain the topic of the article as the subject of the conversation. The rubric will define levels of understanding.

The assignment will provide five sources. Students will identify the speaker/ conversationalist. They will also provide an annotation for each of the sources. The students will practice activities similar to what academics and researchers do in their professional work.

The infographic shows the two goals, to identify the conversationalist and the topic of conversation. The method of instruction is the process of completing the assignment. The assessment shows the rubric for evaluation.



Figure 5: Poster illustrating lesson planning for ACRL Framework concept Scholarship as Conversation

Information Has Value

The goal of the lesson is to introduce students to the concept of value and then relate that understanding to information. These librarians wanted students to consider what they treasure, what our culture considers valuable, and how changed circumstances can alter a person's determination of the worth of something. The Oxford English Dictionary defines value as "Worth or quality as measured by a standard of equivalence. The material or monetary worth of something; the amount at which something may be estimated in terms of a medium of exchange, as money or goods, or some other similar standard." This proposed class session will challenge students to examine what they value.

The lesson assessment will require students to answer questions in pre- and post-testing. The pretest might contain the simple question "How do you define value?" Post-test questions could include finding information resources that would exemplify a particular type of value. A meta-cognitive question requiring the student to reflect on their learning would require the student to evaluate their understanding of what is valuable. For more information regarding the use of metacognition in information literacy, see Eveline Houtman's (2015) article entitled: *Mind-blowing*.

A directed class discussion of value will begin the lesson. The discussion will cover concepts such as: money, time, effort, meaning, relevance, and ascribed value and would subsequently relate those concepts to information. The leader could question what makes information worthy of payment: should medical information be in a special category and freely available, what about websites with questionable credibility, is there information that can be labelled truth?

This group's infographic provides a very detailed lesson plan which includes four teaching/learning activities.

1. Playing "Price is Right", using database resources and having the student contestants guess the cost of the articles.
2. Present a scenario where someone has been diagnosed with cancer, instruct the students to find health resources.
3. Have the students find environmental information, then evaluate the information for bias, perhaps using the financial data within the information source as a persuasive element.
4. Direct the students to search their course syllabus for the requirements for getting a particular grade. The requirements could indicate the value to the professor of a particular assignment and the student can determine the personal value of a particular grade.

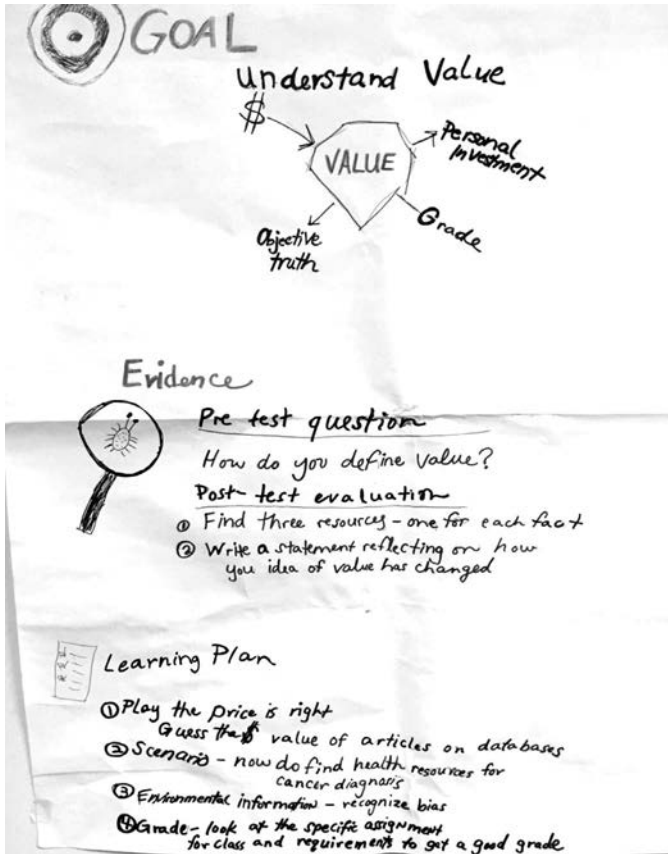


Figure 6: Poster illustrating lesson planning for ACRL Framework concept Information has Value

Conclusion

This conference session was lively. The participants had to bond quickly and work very fast to accomplish each of the lesson planning tasks within the time allotted. Librarians enjoyed the session and rated their experience positively. What might have made the session more profitable to all participants would have been a full group discussion of the lesson plans. If librarians could have questioned, commented on, and added suggestions to the reporters who presented the infographics, there might have been even more insightful sharing. †

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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