"Effective FYC-Library Collaborations: On the Merits of Not Doing Too Much"
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1. Shared Goals, Little Documented Collaboration

Donna

The shared goals of FYC instructors and librarians have been documented by both fields.

Yet there is little documented formal collaboration between the two, at least in composition journals. In his 2009 bibliography of librarian-composition collaborations, librarian Michael Mounce found several published case studies, all in library journals and books primarily targeting librarians. As one collaborative of writing faculty and librarians stated in a recent *Composition Studies* article, our respective fields have so far failed "to reflect upon institutional practices and to build mutually supportive, engaged, and collaborative theories of blended IL and writing instruction" (Artman et al 95).

Kathy

According to a survey conducted by Ricker and Kaplan of 336 librarians and FYC faculty, 65% said that the librarians encouraged the collaboration between the two areas. Most of the articles that we will be citing throughout this presentation appear in the library literature, rather than the composition literature [with a couple notable exceptions].

Question 1: How can we get FYC faculty more involved in this conversation? Specifically, what might be helpful for FYC faculty to understand about librarians' roles?

Librarians view first year writing as a valuable site of "authentic inquiry" [find quote] for research. Composition is taught in the first year so that students are equipped with skills and concepts about writing that they can build on throughout their academic careers. The FYC is a natural entry point for introducing concepts of information literacy, since many of the concepts of IL and FYC align. Thus librarians see themselves as natural allies to FYC instructors.

Librarians have been writing about partnering with first-year writing programs since at least the early 1980s. Composition instructors, however, have only recently begun to see that librarians can play a role beyond the perfunctory one-shot session. Library instruction is viewed in much the same way that writing instruction was viewed just a few decades ago - as a "service course" (Elmborg, "Scope" 136) One writing professor realized that, in asking librarians to provide a "single 'dose' of library instruction" in the form of the one-shot, "he was asking the library to inoculate *his* students against bad research habits, much as others on campus were asking him to inoculate *their* students against bad writing habits" (Jacobs 74-75). Just as writing instruction shifted to place an emphasis on the writing process rather than the writing product, so research instruction is shifting toward an emphasis on the research process.

2. "Research" and Early Stages

Donna

Question 2: How much is feasible in a (one-semester) FYC?

One reason for this failure to reflect and to collaborate may be that we are all trying to do too much. All too often, collaboration between librarians and FYC instructors involves a one-shot library session in which librarians are expected to cover "research." What research means in this context is frequently source-driven: where to find sources, how to evaluate them, and how to document them. These are valuable skills, as recognized by the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition. But appropriate scaffolding and teaching for transfer means reconceptualizing "research" as about inquiry and critical thinking (as well as sources), and starting collaboration far earlier in the research process.

Kathy

Question 3: What do we mean by "research"?

One of the first tasks facing a FYC instructor and librarian who want to collaborate is developing a shared definition of "research," or at least an understanding of what the other means by that term.

To many librarians, particularly those who work with first-year students, research does not mean simply finding sources. Yet in their one-shot session, this is exactly what most librarians are asked to teach. Birmingham et al. notes that first year writing faculty often "assign research and teach writing," (7) leaving librarians to teach "research" without a context in one session, at the reference desk, or not at all. The emphasis then becomes on what Elmborg terms the "grammar" of information - Boolean connectors, subject headings, call numbers, etc. These skills are all important, just as sentence structure is an important skill in writing. But, Elmborg says, these are "isolated skills that separate research from the making of meaning" ("Information" 73).

Artman et al. assert that by removing research from the context of writing and asking librarians to teach it "as a single and discrete unit disconnected from rhetorical concerns, we powerfully influence the way students come to understand and engage information" (96). This affects not only how they view research in terms of their first year writing but across the curriculum. They find just enough sources to meet the assignment requirements, search only for information that agrees with their predetermined argument, dismiss sources that disagree, and view research as a means to an end, rather than a valuable part of knowledge creation. They develop what Leckie describes as a coping strategy, rather than an information-seeking strategy (202) or, as we describe it, an understanding of the research process and the recursive nature of research and writing.

Donna

Question 4: What are significant early stages in the research process?

Our own collaboration emphasizes research *process* over sources, favoring an emphasis on *inquiry* in the *early stages* of the research process. These early stages involve a time of students' exploration of their topics as well as their own interests and investments, in the process of organically narrowing focus to a research question. In her empirically based six-stage version of the research process, library professor Carol Kuhlthau devotes fully half of the stages to this prefocus process:

* The first stage, "initiation," involves an awareness of a lack of knowledge or understanding of some area.
* In the second stage, "selection," students identify a general topic
* And in "exploration" (the third stage) they discover inconsistent/incompatible information on a topic.

In their "conversation model" of the research process, librarians Jeanne Davidson and Carole Anne Crateau have described the early research process as "eavesdropping" - reading around to determine the different conversations, speakers, and vocabularies - before "entering" a conversation. In a related metaphor, librarian Paula McMillen and composition professor Erik Hill draw a comparison between this early stage and "listening" in on the conversations of the Burkean parlor and, only after listening, "put[ting] in your oar" (Burke 110-11, cited by McMillen and Hill at 11).

Kathy

What students often lack (and what is missing from their coping strategy) is the first performance indicator in the ACRL Standards - the ability to define and articulate their information need (1.1). In our terms, this boils down to the ability to formulate a research question, a question that guides not only their search, but their entire writing and research process. It's a question that they can return to when their search gets muddy, that they can refine as they gather more information, and that leads them down new avenues of thought.

Question-driven research involves, not finding the answers, as students often think, but finding the building blocks to begin to construct an answer, even if that answer is unclear or deviates from their previous conceptions (Bodi 112). Sonia Bodi writes: "Questions drive our thoughts beneath the surface and force us to confront complexity" (112). This emphasis on inquiry is crucial if students are to shift from thinking of research as simply a way to find quotes to add to their already-written papers and instead think of it as a way to gain knowledge, to gain new ideas and points of view (Deitering 59).

Librarians see students every day who come to them with "vaguely formulated" topics and quickly become frustrated when they can't find the "perfect source" that says exactly what they want it to say. By getting students to ask questions about the "how" rather than the "what" (focusing on inquiry rather than sources) librarians can get the student to identify key concepts within that larger idea and work on developing key terms to describe those concepts. These questions help them begin to identify, not just potential sources, but potential arguments. In many cases, this requires helping them find the very background sources that faculty believe will help them narrow their topic down to a question.

3. "Not Doing Too Much"

Question 5: What does "not doing too much" look like?

What an emphasis on inquiry in the early stages of the research process looks like in practice will depend, of course, on the local contexts of faculty-librarian collaborations. [We would be happy to discuss our own and others' approaches further in the Q&A].

"Not doing too much" involves coming to the realization that this is the beginning of a process that should be scaffolded into the curriculum. Barratt suggests that faculty should "engage in a dialogue" about how best to introduce research in FYC and "how to extend and

develop their understanding of research across the curriculum" (55). We cannot cover all of information literacy in FYC. What we can do, however, is find the best place to introduce IL into our courses or our programs to serve our students. Jacobs and Jacobs advise that "collaborations need to be grassroots: manageable and organic to a course, a teacher, a librarian, a library, an institution, and, above all, connected with all stakeholders - especially students" (79). As librarians work with researchers across all disciplines and will be extending IL throughout the curriculum, they should naturally be a part of this dialogue.

Donna

One of the complexities of collaboration is determining *who should be responsible* for teaching and responding to what aspect of the early research process. Kuhlthau's early stages - initiation, selection, and exploration - could prove helpful here. Composition faculty might work with students to initiate their interests and select topics - in light of course themes, readings, and assignments. Librarians might coordinate with faculty in the process of exploration, helping students to articulate and to refine their topics by finding, making sense of, and preliminarily engaging with others.

When instructional responsibilities overlap, another challenge is the *differences that inform our respective disciplinary orientations* as librarians and composition faculty. For example, in their interviews with instructional librarians and writing faculty, librarian Jennifer Nutefall and writing faculty Phyllis Mentzell Ryder discovered differing disciplinary perspectives on when in the research process students should formulate a research question, with librarians favoring an earlier formulation. Clearly, in order for collaboration to work, these kinds of disciplinary differences need to be recognized, articulated, and discussed.

A third issue is how best to collaborate in responding to *students' emotions* respecting the early research process. At the beginning of the research process, Kuhlthau describes students as commonly feeling uncertainty, apprehension, confusion, doubt, and low confidence. Effective research and writing requires students to tolerate these uncomfortable feelings so as not to derail the complexity with which they think about and address their topic. Librarians can be important allies for students who may be too shy to share their frustrations and perceived shortcomings with the composition faculty who will be grading their work.

4. Merits, Benefits, and Transfer

Question 6: What benefits might this kind of research pedagogy offer?

This conversation starter was prompted in part by the exasperation expressed by a colleague (and shared by me) at the recent CCCC's session: "How can we possibly teach the research paper in a single term?" I don't have an answer for that, except to say that maybe we shouldn't. Maybe we should teach inquiry, working with students to formulate good questions, and to do so as part of the early stages of the research process.

There are several merits to "not doing too much" in teaching research and writing. For students, giving time and attention to the earlier stages of the research process can motivate student writers as they develop and pursue questions they are interested in, rather than those that are merely expedient (Nutefall & Ryder 438). As students develop competencies in selecting and refining a topic and question, they often develop later-stage research competencies as well. (The early research process can involve other steps identified in the *ACRL Standards* - e.g., preliminarily *finding* and *evaluating* sources on a topic; *analyzing* and

synthesizing sources for the conversations their writers participate in and how; building an initial *knowledge base* regarding the terms and conduct of these conversations; and comparing the conversations to students' own *values* and interests.) As a result, students are better able to know what's relevant to their topic, to integrate their thinking, to shape their conclusions, and to communicate what they have learned (439; Deitering & Jameson 64).

The FYC research paper itself may not be transferable to the student's later writing assignments, particularly those undertaken within specific disciplinary contexts. But I would venture that the intellectual and emotional competencies developed as part of the early stages of the research process are readily transferable. Based on my work with students in First Year Seminar and general education literature courses, I perceive there is ongoing value in students' ability to engage with others when formulating and refining topics and questions, all while managing their uncertainty, apprehension, and other uncomfortable emotions.

Kathy

I work with freshmen all the way up to graduate students, and I can see the benefits of an inquiry-driven research process. This approach, rather than a source-driven one, is more readily transferable, as it revolves around a generalizable process rather than tool-specific training. As students acquaint themselves with the language of their chosen disciplines, they can adapt their questions to ask those appropriate to that field and utilize them in subject-specific sources and search tools. Furthermore, they can employ this kind of thinking in their non-academic lives as well.

Composition faculty may only work with students in their first year. Librarians, however, have the opportunity to collaborate and impact students all four years. This is particularly true at a small institution like ours. By including the librarian as part of this inquiry-driven process, students also begin to view the librarian, not just as someone who can help them with the technical aspects of the databases or with their citations, but as someone who can help them ask the right questions to guide their research process. Librarians can then become a source of support to them throughout their academic career.

As a librarian, one of the merits of this approach is gaining what Rycker and Kaplan call a "thinking partner" in the composition instructor. We become entrenched in the language and theories of our respective fields, and through collaboration, we have the opportunity to see those same ideas with new eyes. In addition, as Elmborg notes, our cultures differ ("Scope" 142). Although librarians are beginning to talk more about pedagogy (and indeed, certain areas, such as instructional design, are built around it), the nature of our role in the university typically requires us to be much more practice-focused, especially if we are not in tenure-track positions. Writing instructors, on the other hand, more frequently engage in discussions of pedagogy in the literature of their discipline and perhaps feel more comfortable with those concepts. We can both benefit from the other's approach and perspective, but we also have to understand it if we are to collaborate successfully.

Donna

And for librarians and composition faculty, there is relief in "not doing too much," relief in not participating in the fantasy of coverage, in falsely assuming that we can do it all. As librarian Anne-Marie Deitering and compositionist Sara Jameson remind us:

[O]ur students will not become critical thinkers in one assignment, one portfolio, one library session, or even one course. Our goal is to introduce our students to a new way of thinking about research and writing" (60-61).

<u>Sources</u>

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