ACRL’s Immersion Program allows librarians to devote nearly five full days to exploring information literacy and what it means for their teaching, students, colleagues, and institution. The intensive, immersive experience can be overwhelming at times, but participants leave with a wealth of ideas and a renewed commitment to excellence in teaching. This presentation will outline a few of the “Aha!” moments I had during the program as well as how I applied them to my own teaching after returning home. I hope to give you all concrete, useful ideas for your own teaching.

I attended the ACRL Immersion Program this summer, participating in the Teacher Track, which allows for an intensive focus on basic teaching skills, such as classroom techniques, crafting learning objectives, effective assessment, learning theory, and the fundamentals of information literacy.

If you’re unfamiliar with ACRL’s Immersion Program, I highly recommend taking a look at what they have to offer. Applications for 2011 Teacher and Program tracks are due December 1.

As a new librarian only a year into my first professional position, and a graduate of an information science program that lacked coursework on instruction, I had mixed feelings about my skills as a teacher. Though I had been doing information literacy instruction since 2005--long before I entered library school--I knew I had room for significant improvement. My current position carries a heavy load of collection development and management duties, so even a year out of library school I hadn’t been able to take the time to simply focus on instruction for an extended period of time. To think “deep thoughts” about teaching just hadn’t been possible yet, so I jumped at the chance to participate in Immersion.

Several of my colleagues here at the University of Colorado-Boulder had participated in Immersion in the past, so I had both institutional and financial support to attend. My cadre of Immersion alumni back home also helped me feel comfortable implementing the ideas I brought back to Boulder.

While at Immersion, I had three major epiphanies:
  Do more with less.
  Trust your students. They know stuff.
  Show. Don’t just tell.

While these conclusions all seem painfully obvious, and they are things that on some level I already knew, my time at Immersion allowed me to really think HARD about their implications--examining my own teaching critically, aided by valuable feedback from fellow participants, and with an eye toward making positive changes for myself and my students.
So as the Art & Architecture Librarian here at CU-Boulder, how have I transformed these “Aha!” moments into better teaching?

*slide 6 - do more with less*

**Do more with less.**

This “Aha!” moment has had a profound effect on the way I approach the work that has to be done before I step into the classroom. One of the first changes I made after returning home from Immersion was to spend less time on instruction prep. I no longer agonize over finding perfect examples to show students. I don’t spend hours trying to familiarize myself with many of the example student topics the instructor has given me beforehand. I have begun setting constructive limits for myself based on student needs, the course assignment, and a more realistic assessment of the return on investment for preparation.

Want an example of how I implemented this? In September I was invited to make a guest appearance in a large, undergraduate-level planning course. I was given 25 minutes with students in a large lecture hall, the time having been carved out of the instructor’s lecture for that day. A miniature version of the typical “one shot,” if you will. This is obviously not the ideal situation for information literacy instruction, but it fits our theme of doing more with less, no?

Going into this situation, I used two important facts to my advantage:
1. student assignments for this class would focus on planning topics relevant to the Boulder/Denver metro area--they wouldn’t be looking outside of this region
2. though the library has a number of subject guides available online, we did not yet have one for urban planning, and in fact we’ve never had one.

*slide 7 - planning subject guide*

Instead of spending time on instruction prep per se, I spent an hour putting together a very bare bones subject guide for urban and regional planning. It is not comprehensive or exhaustive, and it is definitely a work in progress. But it’s certainly better than what we had before--the complete lack of a web-based subject guide for this discipline.

[demo of actual guide online at http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/art/planning.htm](http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/art/planning.htm)

When it comes to instruction, “doing more with less” doesn’t mean doing more work with fewer resources. Rather, it means working within constraints, setting reasonable boundaries, and making the most of what is possible. It also means not waiting around for the ideal, but instead making do with what you have at hand. A corollary of “do more with less” might be “something is better than nothing.”

Honestly, I don’t think students care if the subject or course guides I make for them are absolutely comprehensive and perfect. I think they are perfectly happy using incomplete and imperfect guides, as long as it helps them find the information they need. And an imperfect, incomplete research guide is better than no guide at all.

*slide 8 - trust your students. they know stuff.*

**Trust your students. They know stuff.**

Our students aren’t blank slates. They arrive with prior knowledge, and it’s my job to connect what they already know to what they need to know. While it’s true many of them don’t know even very basic things--like the difference between a book and a journal article, how to recognize scholarly and popular sources, or how to avoid or even recognize plagiarism.
They do know how to type into a search box, how to click around a database’s user interface, and how to explore. They’ve used Amazon, Google, Facebook, and online retailers’ websites--and all of these give them skills that actually translate well to using most databases. Sure, they don’t know what a “facet” is, but they’ve certainly used one while buying things online and searching for people on Facebook.

So how have I changed the way I teach based on this insight?

I’ve stopped doing a few things, for example...
--demonstrating our OPAC (with one caveat that I’ll explain in a bit)
--demonstrating individual databases

And instead, I’m making them try things out for themselves. We discuss their experiences, and I point out any “can’t miss” tips they haven’t already found out for themselves. Overall, I’m trying to move away from doing things for them.

For example, when I’m teaching students how to find images, instead of demo-ing a few resources, I might divide the class into pairs or small groups. Each member has to teach themselves how to use a particular resource (like ARTstor, AP Images, or our local digital image collection), and then teach it to their partner or the other members of the class. I find that this works very well, and it keeps students engaged.

This final insight-- “show, don’t just tell”--has also resulted in a few important changes in the classroom.

My library has discovery tools incorporated into our OPAC and our electronic resources. Encore and Research Pro (both from Innovative), provide new ways for students to find and retrieve material. While our students have generally reacted positively to these tools, they have caused some frustration among librarians (myself included).

Encore, the discovery tool for our OPAC, can sometimes make it hard to find known items, and as of yet does not have advanced search functionality. It also mixes in a few articles along with the results from the OPAC, which seems to confuse and distract students. A link to a PDF plopped down in the middle of a bunch of book results is just a shiny object few undergrads can resist.

I frequently see students bypassing individual databases and ending up looking at only what they find in Encore. Time and again, I have seen students assume that what they’re looking at in Encore constitutes the entire body of scholarly work on a subject.

I used to just tell students “don’t click on those article results you find in Encore.” But now I show them WHY. Perhaps the best example of this is finding architectural plans, sections, and drawings. To find this kind of material in journal articles, the Avery Index provides functionality that Encore simply doesn’t. And clicking on the article results in Encore can lead students to popular magazine articles almost as often as it leads to scholarly journal articles. In order to help students understand why they need to go to the Avery Index to find plans, sections, and drawings, I have them try the process out themselves, and I make sure we discuss it. I talk about how going directly to Avery is faster--focusing on selling it to them.
as something that’s in their best interest, not just something I want them to do. I try to get them to understand what’s so special about a specialized resource like Avery. So show, don’t just tell. And sell! Sell your students on the idea that they don’t just need the first few articles that a discovery tool can throw at them. Instead, they need better results so they can write better papers and get better grades.

I’m never going to stop students from using discovery tools, and if fact I wouldn’t want to. Instead, I want to help them understand why they might want to user other resources at their disposal, and how those resources might be beneficial for the end product--their paper or project.

I hope that this brief presentation has given you a sense of how much my experience has affected (and continues to affect!) my teaching. Immersion is huge commitment of time, energy, and money, but it is certainly worth it. I have been able to apply much of what I learned almost immediately after returning home. While these three insights might still appear rather mundane, they have given me a renewed sense of excitement about teaching. I hope you have found them useful as well.

*slide 13 - image credits

THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS?