Chapter 13
Librarians and Instructional Design Challenges:
Concepts, Examples, and a Flexible Design Framework

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a conceptual and practical perspective on instructional design problems that librarians face, from the perspective of design research. Librarians see increasing need to provide instruction to their users in new ways and on new topics as the world becomes digital and global in nature. The expanding instructional role of librarians requires instructional design skills. However, many librarians have little formal training on instructional design, leading to concerns and confusion about instructional design skills, problems and processes. This chapter discusses design, instructional design issues, concerns and problems (typical and specific to librarians), and explores a conceptual framework to support flexible instructional design based upon the concept of design as a discipline. Examples, recommendations and supporting resources are included.

INTRODUCTION

In our rapidly changing digital and global world, librarians see increasing need to provide instruction to their users in new ways and on new topics. More library users expect and require library services to be in online or blended format. Librarians' roles have expanded as library resources and services transition to digital/virtual formats. Librarians are more frequently required to provide instruction. The libraries' traditional instructional topics such as locating resources are still very important but even traditional topics now have a digital spin. For example, library users still need to learn to locate library books but now those books may be in digital format in a large online repository. Library users may need instruction on accessing and navigating the online repository, searching for e-books, checking out and returning

e-books, installing and using e-reader software on their home computer, using an e-reader, using the computers in the library, and staying safe when using the Internet. Locating and reading digital materials can be complex, requiring computer and information literacy skills.

Librarians may also need to provide instruction on copyright, fair use, plagiarism, identity theft, virus protection, assistive technology, citation management, data visualization, file formats, and many other topics. Librarians are likely to work with a wider range of users than many teachers do. Library users can be of any age, educational level, discipline, background, ability or culture. Users may be in fairly predictable groups, such as a third grade class in need of help accessing an online encyclopedia, or completely unpredictable such as a walk-in patron in need of immediate assistance locating online data on an obscure topic.

How does the librarian know how to design instruction for such a wide range of users and topics?

Often librarians may not know how to design effective instruction. Librarians tend to learn about the design of instruction on the job. Many librarians have little or no formal training on instructional design (Booth, 2010; Hovious, 2016).

Merrill & Wilson (2007) estimated that in higher education as much as 95% of instructional design is performed by designers-by-assignment: those assigned do instructional design without formal training.

Merrill has a perspective specifically applicable to librarians struggling to learn instructional design on the job. He asks whether we need to acknowledge that instructional design is and will continue to be performed by designers-by-assignment (those assigned to do instructional design without formal training as an instructional designer), and shift our activities from training instructional designers to the study of instruction and creating instructional design tools that allow everyone to be more effective designers of instruction. He states that designers-by-assignment do 95% of all instructional design and many instructional products fall very short of their potential.

This implies that faculty are most often designers-by-assignment. The same appears to be true for librarians. Concerns and issues associated with librarians as designers-by-assignment are included throughout this chapter.

Librarians' concerns and confusion about instructional design skills, problems and processes are widespread. Issues include dynamic evolution of library services, appropriate pedagogical education for librarians, how to design instruction, identifying and meeting user needs, improving teaching and technology skills, requirements for online and blended instruction, integrating information literacy instruction in the classroom, supporting data-intensive research and incorporating active learning (Bertot, Sarin, & Jaeger, 2016; Booth, 2010; Boyer, 2015; Brecher & Klipfel, 2014; Hovious, 2016; Jaguszewski & Williams, 2013; Lorenzen, 2012). Instructional design can play a role in addressing these issues, emphasizing the need for librarians to improve instructional design skills.

There is no single answer to how librarians can improve instructional design skills. However, familiarity with the types of challenges faced during design of instruction can provide useful insights. As discussion of challenges is more effective when a framework for addressing those challenges is included, this chapter explores a conceptual framework to support flexible design based on design research trends and industry best practices. The framework provides an effective structure to help librarians/designers cope with information and cognitive overload.

In light of these issues and concerns, this chapter proposes to address the following objectives:

1.   What types of instructional design challenges do librarians face?

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