

# Immersion 2000

## Making learning happen

by Rosemary McAndrew

Against a backdrop of Mount Rainier, the participants of ACRL's Institute for Information Literacy Immersion 2000 program worked and played together this summer. The University of Washington (UW) in Seattle was the setting for this intensive journey that took its participants (from the States, Jamaica, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia) through an intensive information literacy curriculum.

For four-and-one-half days, the faculty and staff of this national program housed,

challenged, provoked, and nurtured us. As it was explained to us, "An immersion program is not a conference, nor a meeting, nor a workshop . . . it is an active process in which you, as participants, share responsibility with each other and the faculty to make learning happen."

### The sessions

The Track 1 curriculum, designed for librarians

who are interested in defining themselves as instruction/teaching librarians, began with a plenary session delivered to all participants by Anne Zald, special assistant to the director at UW. In her address, "Towards an Understanding of Information Literacy in Higher Education: History, Definition, and Challenges," Zald

explained how information literacy takes its shape from cultural and organizational contexts.

As one of the many competing agendas in higher education,

information literacy puts students and learning at the center and emphasizes transferable competencies to lifelong learning. Asserting the educational importance of libraries is the challenge we face as we move from bibliographic instruction to information literacy in our instruction programs.

By the end of this plenary address, my role in this challenge began to emerge as I thought about partnerships with other fac-



Participants in this year's Immersion Program.

### About the author

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ulty, assessment of learning, and the development of myself as a teacher. It was clear that the message of Immersion 2000 was that we were all to contribute to the information literacy knowledge base.

Joan Kaplowitz, from the Biomedical Library at UCLA, led us through our session on “The Psychology of Learning: the Theories behind the Practice of Teaching.” One of the Track I preconference assignments was to complete a learning style inventory, which in itself is an eye-opening exercise. Throughout the learning activities of this session we were asked to think about our understanding of learning theory and learning styles and how they might impact our approach to instruction.

“Presentation Technique and Evaluation” addressed the broader issues of good teaching and sound learning environments. It offered the participants an opportunity to pull back from the day-to-day concerns of library instruction and to reflect on the nature of education, teaching, and learning.

Susan Barnes Whyte from Linfield College Library in Oregon showed us the “heart of a teacher” as she helped participants review instruction situations for presentation techniques of voice, body and attitude. The small group presentations, prepared in advance of Immersion 2000, were evaluated by our peers and demonstrated how a lecture can be powerful when the content is memorable and the delivery dynamic. Many of the bonds that lasted throughout the program took root during this exercise as trust and risk changed places. This session asked what we were learning about ourselves as teachers.

The next day found participants immersed in assessment. Debra Gilchrist from Pierce College in Lakewood, Washington, reminded us that assessment is much more than a definition: It is about students and learning. Armed with this insight, the rule to always work backwards, with plenty of permission to fail, the Track I participants endeavored to relate assessment to instruction, develop measurable outcomes, and evaluate various assessment techniques in our own settings.

“Teaching with Technology: Implementing the Principles of Good Practice” brought back Anne Zald with the expertise she acquired as an instructor in UWired and chair of the Information Literacy Committee at UW. During small group reflections and discussions, participants forged plans for the use of new technologies in the classroom and in the electronic environment. Reviewing both good and bad classroom practices helped the participants link to lessons learned in the earlier sessions on learning theory and styles.

### **Apply for 2001 program**

If Rosemary's report had you thinking what a great experience the Immersion program would be for you or a staff member, now is the time to apply for the 2001 program. The ACRL Institute for Information Literacy Immersion program will be held at the State University of New York in Plattsburgh, August 2-8, 2001.

The program includes two tracks. Track 1, “Librarian as Teacher,” focuses on individual development for new librarians or instruction librarians who are interested in enhancing, refreshing, or extending their individual instruction skills. Track II, “Librarian as Program Manager,” focuses on developing, integrating, and managing institutional and programmatic information literacy programs; some attention will be given to individual instructional skill development.

A description of the program and application materials are on the Web at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/initiatives.html>. Applications are due to the ACRL office by December 15, 2000.

Susan Barnes Whyte rejoined Track I folks for a session on "Pedagogy." Working in small groups, the Broken Method Exercise forced us to look at specific teaching methods, their deficiencies, and strategies for improvement. As the groups reported back, the richness of skills and knowledge of the participants was evident and long lists of problem solving data were disclosed.

Karen Williams, Digital Library Initiatives team leader at the University of Arizona, led the "Leadership and Management" session. As she guided us through the definitions, self-assessment, tools, and learning aspects of the topic, one could see the participants picturing themselves in past and future lives. It was so clear that "since leadership represents a possible set of actions for everyone in the community, anyone can choose to lead." We wrote vision statements for information literacy and leadership growth plans. Immersion 2000 was the setting for some impressive risktaking.

## Final thoughts

From our nun-like cells in a beautiful gothic building, we emerged each morning to face the Immersion 2000 challenges. As each day (and night!) unfolded, fears were disclosed, friendships made, conflicts aired, and affinity groups were being formed. The roundtable discussions that were orchestrated by the Immersion faculty, affectionately known as "Birds of a Feather," were just one of the affinities that formed. Folks exchanged business cards and e-mail addresses, building a network of colleagues we knew we could call on in the future.

On the fourth night of the program, the participants joined the faculty for a dinner cruise on Puget Sound. That sunset will be the "thought behind the smile" for a long time to come.

Since those fateful days in August, an electronic list has facilitated communication among the participants. By now the participants of Immersion 2000 know that they were involved in a "deep learning," the one that "makes a difference in people's lives." ■

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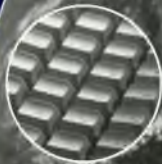
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