Hands-Off Instruction: A Study of the Effectiveness of a Media-Based Library Instruction Module

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BACKGROUND

Georgia College, a four-year senior college in the University System, offers only limited informal library instruction to its students. In the past, with the exception of English 102 classes, it has been offered on an **ad hoc** basis as individual faculty members have requested it. One justification for the lack of a structured library orientation program has been the premise, current in the library profession, that the most effective bibliographic instruction is personalized, "hands-on" experience. To accomodate large numbers of students, classroom instruction seemed the only viable means of accomplishing the task of instruction without sacrificing the personal element. Also, it has been difficult to divert manpower from routine library operations to develop any sort of innovative program. The current bibliographic instruction staff consists of the two professional reference librarians, and this meager team must serve 3200-3400 students. Fortunately, they are most ably assisted by a paraprofessional on the reference desk, but the demands of her duties as Interlibrary Loan Librarian prevent her from participating in classroom instruction. During quarters when library media courses are offered to school librarians, the team attenuates further, with chaotic, often ludicrous results.

English 102 is part of the Core Curriculum, and in the normal sequence of courses, it is the student's introduction to writing a documented term paper. Traditionally, the theme of the paper had to be some literary aspect of a given novel, poem, short story or play. The librarians saw this paper as the logical place in the academic curriculum to introduce students to the use of the library. Within the framework of the paper, they reasoned, they could demonstrate the necessity of handbooks, indexes adn abstracting sources, and prove their very practical value to any kind of research. The English Department, too, saw the logic of this reasoning, and was very supportive of the library program.

Students in English 102 were required to spend one week of their English class-time on an instructional tour of the Library facilities. The mini-course was divided into three sessions of library orientation; 1) General Orientation and the Card Catalog; 2) General Indexes; 3) Literary Reference Sources. The two reference librarians prepared accompanying homework assignments for each of the three class sessions, and a short exam at week's end. The average of the three homework scores and the exam comprised five per cent of the student's final English grade.

The defects of this system were revealed slowly through many quarters of teaching. Foremost was the problem of cheating. Students tended to work in packs on their homework, and, until the exam was monitored, showed little compunction about discussing and comparing answers. Sometimes they could not help but be influenced by their classmates due to the fact that so many were forced to work with the same reference sources simultaneously. Even the distribution of multiple sets of questions did not seem to relieve the tendency to work together on one question until the answer was "found", and copied vociferously. The occasional individualist often seemed to be badgered for answers by his classmates.

More flagrant students marked indexes, frequently beside an incorrect citation, so that (supposedly) the next student would not have to exert any effort to find "the answer." The results were discouraging for the library instructors (as when, for example, students who were asked for an article about a short story by James Joyce — leading them, hopefully, to *Twentieth Century Short Story Explication* on their "Source List" — would give the citation to an article about a **poem** by James Joyce from *Poetry Explicator* also on the "Source List"). Distributing multiple sets of homework only seemed to make the aswers more nonsensical. Some students seemed to copy answers from others' sheets without even bothering to check for a "match" to their questions. Confronted with their dishonesty, students became sullen, indifferent, even defiant. Only occasionally were they converted.

The second, and more basic problem, of which the student's dishonesty was symptomatic, was their antipathy toward the library, and, more importantly, toward reading. Most of them had not read, and would never read, the old classic chestnuts that had been assigned by their instructors. In fact it was questionable whether some of them were even capable of reading, for example, Thomas Hardy's loquacious descriptions of sheep-farming in Wessex, complete with nineteenth-century dialectical terms.

The students' negative attitude upon entering a library instruction class was changed only if the pedgogical antics of the instructor diverted them. For the most part, however, instructors felt that even comedy could not rouse the students from their torpor — at least, not as indicated by their test scores. As the panic of the term-paper deadline set in, it became manifest that the classroom instruction had left only the dimmest of impressions. The students still did not grasp the difference between the author/title and subject sides of the card catalog, and worse, they still seemed to want information "spoon-fed" to them. The sole function of the class seemed to be directional guidance; most of them seemed to remember where the reference desk was when their paper came due.

Most alarmingly, the students showed by their performance on the essay portion of the Regents' Examination that their writing skills had actually deteriorated, rather than improved, in English 102. A crisis conference convened in the English Department resulted in the abandonment of the literary term paper in favor of more frequent short-essay exercises. The library was asked to alter its orientation classes accordingly.

Finally, considerations of library cost-effectiveness had to be considered. While the library's philosophic orientation is patron (student/faculty) service, particularly in the areas of reference and user-instruction, several members of the staff felt that the English 102 class had engendered a sort of academic intellectual welfare state. Moreover, the staggering number of English 102 sections — ten in one quarter of 1981 — often meant rescheduling more advanced bibliographic tours to remaining odd hours of a given day. The cumulative effect of sheer numbers on the morale of the teaching staff was debilitating. The strain of grading homework and tests

to meet English Department deadlines, repeating (at the expense of other patrons) a capsule classroom lecture at the reference desk ad nauseam, and attempting to perform routine professional duties in the meantime, caused considerable burn-out.

The teaching team reassessed what it was trying to accomplish. On an experimental basis, the General Indexes section was dropped; the titles on the Literary Reference Sources section were reduced by a third; the exam was more strictly monitored. Yet the streamlining only served to point out the fundamental weaknesses of the program: the boringly familiar classroom situation; the condensed, ofen overwhelming subject coverage; and the superficial exposure to bibliographic tools in class. At best the tour had questionable relevance to the academic curriculum in light of the Regent's Examination scores. The blank wall of incomprehension still greeted the instructors from the faces of the English 102 students as they heard the virtues of the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* extolled, or studied bibliographic roadmaps through the tundra of literary esoterica.

By the time the current project began, the teaching team had decided that "bibliographic instruction" and "library orientation," lofty-sounding euphemisms for the class setting in which they were actually engaged, might be best accomplished without histrionics. The vagaries and inconsistencies of classroom instruction might well be supplanted by a form of media-based instruction that purported only to be consistent and informative. Without the authoritarian classroom struggle, experimental modes could be tried, and results monitored until the best mode of transmission was found.

Development of the Module

A plethora of professional literature attests the virtues of media-based instruction. Many studies show the efficacy of using such media as slide/tape and videotape, yet few, if any, recent studies attempt to compare the effectiveness of these media as modes of instruction to the traditional classroom lecture. Seemingly fewer still have compared their relative effectiveness in library instruction.

The teaching team decided to design a project to test the hypothesis that media-based instruction was more effective than the traditional classroom model in increasing awareness of library facilities and services. The team believed that media-based instruction would provide the flexibility in terms of scheduling classes and the individualization of the learning experience that the

situatuation seemed to demand. Moreover, except for the time required for the production of the program, the members of the teaching team would be freed to pursue their normal reference duties. The demoralizing effects of classroom burn-out would be checked. Finally, many of the negative feelings students had been expressing about the library tour, including the boredom and frustration that had culminated in cheating, would be relieved.

One of the investigators applied for a faculty research grant from the College. The grants are available to members of the faculty engaged in research, in increments of no greater than $500, and while not sufficient to cover all expenses, the grant did permit the purchase of a Caramate slide/tape viewer, plus the necessary carousels for slides, casettes, films, etc.

Because of the limited number of slides that could be fitted into a single carousel, it was decided to divide the program into two parts; 1) General Orientation (use of the card catalog, reserve materials, periodical index files) and 2) Literary Reference Sources (when the filming began, the literary reference paper had not yet been dropped as an English 102 course requirement.) Script and slides were designed with some attempt made at humor, e.g., having the staff play "students" on the slide demonstrations, mimicking the student's attitudes as well as those of the librarians, and placing strategic barbs about the profession of literary criticism in the second half. The audio portion was enhanced with introductory music in both parts of the program. To ensure the technical integrity of the program, it was filmed and taped by the College's Media Specialist.

After the production was completed (production time was nine months, working in odd hours, due to processing failures by Kodak, course loads, and the rather high rate of demand for shared media production equipment on campus) a videotape copy was produced, and appropriate videotape equipment was placed on long-term loan in the library by the Media Center. The teaching team and the Media Specialist agreed that the videotape copy seemed smoother and more polished than the slide/tape copy. The immediate benefit of the videotape, however, was that twice as many students, working individually, could view the program at once.

TESTING

Two sections of English 102 students were taught by the traditional method (Control Group), and two were taught by either slide/tape or videotape (Test Group).

The media-based program was basically a condensation of classroom lectures. Much extraneous material had been pruned. Slides had been designed to enhance the meaning of the script. An accompanying workbook contained exercises to be performed at the end of each of seven sections. It was hoped that the immediacy of this programmed instructional technique would reinforce the logic of reference source use for students. The combined playing-time of the complete program was 38 minutes. It had previously taken 150 minutes of class time to cover the same material, less 30 minutes for the specific general indexes which had been cut in conformance with the English Department's curriculum needs at that time. Students were allowed to set up their own two-hour viewing time within the first six weeks of the quarter. Additional time slots were available to the students as needed. Both copies of the program were placed on strict reserve at the circulation desk. Students were to sign for them at their scheduled hours. At that time they were given the workbook, and told that they would not be graded, although completion of the workbook was a prerequisite. Students in the Control Group were graded on their homework and tests as they had been in the past.

Pretests and posttests were administered in both the Control and Test Groups. They consisted of two substantively similar sets of 11 multiple-choice questions concerning general orientation to the library and the use of specific tools like the card catalog. Only two questions were asked about "literary" sources. Students in both the Control and Test Groups were told that the two tests would not be graded. An additional Media Evaluation Form was distributed to the Test Group.

SAMPLE MEDIA EVALUATION FORM

For these questions circle a choice between 1 and 5. (1 = poor; 2 = below average; 3 = average; 4 = good; 5 = excellent)

1. How would you rate the **instructional** quality of this program?
   1 2 3 4 5
2. How would you rate the **technical** quality of this program? (good sound levels; good picture quality; proper focusing, camera angles, adequate lighting, etc.)
   1 2 3 4 5
3. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of this type of instruction compared to normal classroom presentation?
   1 2 3 4 5

For these questions circle yes or no.

4. Did you understand the concepts presented?

    yes   no

5. Did you feel the program was too

    long?   yes no

    too short?   yes no

    boring?   yes no

    too difficult to understand? yes no

    too easy or simplified?   yes no

6. Would you like to see more course material presented in this fashion? Why or why not?

    yes   no

Please write other comments or suggestions on the back; we need your input.

FINDINGS

There was no significant difference between the performance of the Control Group and the Test Group on the posttest. Students in the Control Group had 15% fewer wrong responses on the posttest than on the pretest as compared to 13% fewer wrong responses in the Test Group. (See Table I) A Mann-Whitney U-Test was used to determine any statistical difference at the posttest level. Table II shows no statistically significant difference at the posttest level.

TABLE I.
MEAN TEST SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS CONTROL AND TEST GROUPS SCORES INDICATE NUMBER OF WRONG RESPONSES: MAX. = 11 STANDARD DEVIATIONS ARE IN PARENTHESES
(N =44)

C1=Control Pretest	C3=Test Pretest
C2=Control Posttest	C4=Test Posttest

	Mean	(s.d.)
C1	5.3636	(1.67)
C2	3.8636	(1.50)
C3	5.7955	(1.85)
C4	4.3636	(1.56)

TABLE II

MANN-WHITNEY U-TEST

C2	N=44	Median=4.0000
C4	N=44	Median=4.0000

W=1825.5

The test is significant at .2706; cannot reject at alpha = .05.

However there was a significant correlation between the pretest and posttest performance in the Test Group, whereas the Control Group showed no significant correlation between pretest and posttest scores. That is to say, there was more consistency in the results obtained using the media program than by classroom teaching. The rate of predictability was 36% higher in the Test Group than in the Control Group. (See Table III)

TABLE III
CORRELATION BETWEEN PRETEST AND POSTTEST SCORES

	C1	C2	C3
C2	.270		
C3	-.208	.157	
C4	.002	.300	.656

All students in the Test Group completed a workbook, although some did not complete the second portion of the booklet on Literary Reference Sources. They indicated by their responses on the Media Evaluation Form either that this portion of the program was too difficult for them, or that they did not have time to complete it, i.e., would not complete it, since time was not a factor in the completion of the workbook exercises. At any rate, in light of the findings of the English Department on the essay portion of the Regents' Examinations, it may well be that the concepts of secondary and tertiary reference sources are indeed well beyond their understanding.

The media-based module seemed to make little, if any, difference in the test **performance** of the students. However, the Media Evaluation Form revealed that there was a considerable difference in their **attitude** toward media-based instruction. Fifty-two per cent felt positive about having more media-based instruction (a high figure, where apathy abounds). Eigthy-four per cent felt that they had understood the concepts presented. Other responses indicated areas of the program that needed improvement: 76% said that the program was too long; 69% stated that it was boring; 79% rated the program "too difficult." The program is currently under revision by the teaching team with the foregoing criticisms in mind. The Literary Reference Sources section is being replaced by coverage of more general indexes *Reader's Guide, Essay and General Literature Index* etc.). The workbook exercises will be less numerous, and more concentrated. Also, the format of the workbook is being improved; and parts of the slide sequences are being refilmed to improve technical qualities.

Since the Media Center has acquired two color television cameras, a "live" videotape will be employed for the next program. Editing and shooting techniques inherent to the videotape will greatly simplify the tedium of production, the investigators believe. They also believe that a "live" production will be less alienating to the students because of its essential similarities to television.

The following remarks, received from students on the Media Evaluation Form, indicate that they are indeed ready for a change:

"It is easier [with the media program] to go back in case you missed something."

"I would rather learn this type of material on my own time. I think people get a lot more out of it when they do it rather than listen to a lecture."

Negative remarks received, such as, for example, " . . . . easier to relate to someone who is talking to you in person," bring up several debatable issues. The negligibly higher scores in the Control Group, one might assume, suggest that perhaps students would rather deal with a human than a machine. One of the investigators said repeatedly that he was teaching **people**, not just a subject. On the other hand, the rate of predictability of the performance of the Test Group might mean tht students perform with more consistency when the idiosyncracies of instructor-performance are not left to chance; once produced, the media program does not have off-days, save for failure of equipment.

CONCLUSIONS

While a media-based module of library instruction is not necessarily a more efficient learning instrument than a traditionally pedagogical classroom session, as measured by the performance of students on a general awareness survey administered both before and after instruction, its advantageous to students and staff alike clearly outweigh its disadvantages. English instructors who participated in this experiment felt less pressured to sacrifice scant class time to the necessarily peripheral library unit; the library staff felt freer to pursue their normal duties, since the student aides could demonstrate the use of the videotape and the slide/tape machines; and students, while occasionally displaying some of the recalcitrance typical of those using the library for the first time, felt positive about the novelty of programmed instruction, and relieved by the lessening of crowded conditions around the reference sources. They also seemed to appreciate the fact that their classes were not segmented by team-teaching, and that some effort had been made to accomodate their individual schedules. The media program is more concise than its classroom counterpart; lecture time is more than halved.

Moreover, media-based instruction has the advantage of consistency. The personalities, idiosyncracies, and moods of instructors and students on given days are minimized, and while this may indicate to some still one more example of the depersonalization of our age, it may show a way to create a link between the vast personal chasms that have become evident in higher education with the advent of open

admissions. Such homogenized and neutral instruction can never replace the sudden inspirations and insights of the lecturer in higher-level, creative, or research-oriented courses, but for repetitive units that drain the instructor and the student alike, it may be the very answer educators have been searching for in their paradoxical quest for quality education for the masses.

The Laughing Place Finds a Home
By Leon Alligood

For years the quartet entertained children while parents shopped at Lenox Square. There was Brer Fox, standing human-like on two feet; Brer Rabbit with a wily gleam in his eye; Tarbaby, appropriately silent as stone; and portly Brer Bear eyeing a bull frog face to face.

These concrete figures of perhaps four of the best known characters ever created by a Georgia author were commissioned of Atlanta artist Julian Harris in the early seventies for a display at the large Atlanta shopping center, where they "resided" until 1979. That's when Lenox Square's management decided it was time for the "critters" to start packing.

But what could be done with them? They were too skillfully crafted to deserve the dump, but their size (Brer Bear alone weighs several hundred pounds) made them less than adoptable.

Except to one lady in Madison, when Mrs. Chris Lambert heard that the concrete figures needed a new home she made a beeline for Al Barr's office. Barr, who is vice-president and general manager of the complex, listened to the persuasive speech Mrs. Lambert delivered and, to her delight, found the idea suitable.

After all, what could be a more appropriate home for the Uncle Remus characters than Madison, the home of the Uncle Remus Regional Library.

What Mrs. Lambert proposed was a park on the library's grounds where children could play while parents browsed the stacks inside and where adults could sit and enjoy a good book. Highlighting the landscaped park would be the four Uncle Remus characters.

That was several years ago. After receiving the critters Mrs. Lambert, along with the Library's Director, began mapping out a plan to make their permanent home a reality.

With the help of a few interested citizens the work began. Albeit on financial shakey ground. Persistence and perserverance paid off, however, as more volunteers came to the rescue of the foundling project.

Rather than ask who helped a better question would be who did not. A landscape architect donated his services to develop a pretty, but

affordable, plan and a local nurseryman followed suit by offering to work for the cost of the plants. Meanwhile, the county's 4-H Club donated plenty of muscle to set out the plants and mulching materials. The youngster's efforts earned them top prize in a statewide Community Pride Project.

Even the local government got into the picture by donating labor to haul the statues to Madison and later providing several truckloads of topsoil.

There were other gifts, too. The Kiwanis Club purchased the larger trees planted in the park. The Georgia Railroad Company, through the generousity of then-president Jake Jones, presented the library with several pre-Civil War era cut stones which serve as benches in the park.

Finally, even the name of the park was a gift, given many years ago by the man who penned the Uncle Remus tales, Joel Chandler Harris. When Harris wrote the tale of Brer Rabbit and the "Laughingplace" the Georgia author unknowingly provided a perfect moniker.

When a dedication ceremony for the Laughingplace was held in April, 1981, the day was a joyous one for Mrs. Lambert, the library, and the community. After years of waiting the critters finally had a home they could call their own. Highlighting that opening day program was a performance by Dr. Gil Watson, a Methodist minister from Atlanta who makes a hobby of impersonating Joel Chandler Harris in a reportoire of Uncle Remus stories.

Dr. Watson, sporting a thick handlebar moustache and dressed in period clothing, addressed the mixed crowd of V.I.P's and third graders from Morgan Primary School as if he were Joel Chandler Harris. And they loved it. The kids warmed to the stories and laughed until their bellies ached. Proof enough that the tales contain a timeless humor.

Steve Schaefer, Director of the Uncle Remus Regional Library, is proud of the new park, especially because it was a project of volunteers and private donations, "We need more of this sort of inter-action between the community and the library." Schaeffer said.

presence will lure prospective patrons, especially children, into the library. The idea might work. An oft-repeated scene at the dedication ceremony was of youngsters gingerly patting the belly-button on Brer Bear's wide stomach. There is no other gesture of friendliness that can match a rub on the tummy, so maybe they will return, to see their friends in the Laughingplace, maybe to venture inside the library for a book on the Uncle Remus critters. Who knows, maybe they will start reading and keep reading.

Regardless, Schaeffer said, at least the library will be a friendlier place now that Brer Rabbit and his friends have taken up residence there.