Review Essay: Instruction and Archives

Embedded Librarians. Edited by Cassandra Kvenid and Kaijsa Calkins. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries of the American Library Association, 2011. Softcover. 264 pages. $49.00. ISBN 978-0-8389-8587-8.

What the Best College Teachers Do. By Ken Bain. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004. Hardcover. 207 pages. $29.50. ISBN 0-674-01325-5.

The Joy of Teaching, a Practical Guide for New College Instructors. By Peter Filene. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. Softcover. 176 pages. $25.00. ISBN 0-8078-5603-7.

A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change. By Douglas Thomas and John Seeley Brown. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011. Softcover. 140 pages. $12.95. ISBN 1-456-45888-4.

The fundamental premise of teaching is to help our students learn. Ideally, we also hope to engage them with primary sources and their use. Ultimately, we hope to create current and future users of our collections. Archivists in all areas of the profession and in most varieties of repositories find themselves providing instruction using their collections. Instruction can take many forms, from a contextualized set of items of interest to a group, to a semester-long course on research methods that focuses on unique primary sources and every other version in between. Who and what prepares us for this role? Some may bring to the profession a background in education or pedagogy. Others may be lucky enough to receive training in their master's programs or via continuing education immersion programs. Many of us find ourselves standing in front of a classroom armed only with our experience as students—how we were taught and how we like to learn. In higher education, this is not an unusual path; the bulk of learning how to teach, how to lead a group of students into and through a learning environment, is gained through doing and watching others and occasionally through workshops and other brief training.

How can archivists who find themselves in front of a classroom full of students learn to provide instruction that is both engaging and fulfilling for the students and for ourselves? In the literature for both archivists and special collections librarians, an increasing number of articles and case studies of successful instruction sessions or courses incorporate active learning, faculty collaboration, and innovative pedagogy. In addition, outside of the archival literature, in the literature of information literacy and librarianship, and in the wider realm of teaching and learning in postsecondary education, a tradition of writing about student-centered teaching and learning exists. Readers should note that three of the books discussed in this essay focus on teaching students in higher education, broadly defined. This does not preclude archivists who teach K–12 learners from finding ideas of value to integrate into their instruction, but these grades are not the primary focus of these books.

The four books featured in this essay each bring a different perspective regarding how we best help our students to better learn those concepts or skills that we (and our faculty colleagues) determine are the most important given the time and the resources available to us. Each book approaches this question differently—integrating into the classroom, creating an environment for student-centered learning, and looking to networked technology to create a new culture of learning.

Embedded Librarians

> Proactive initiatives such as this [embedded librarianship collaboration] are critical to university culture and provide students with the knowledge necessary for academic success. (p. 193)

For those of us who work in university or college libraries, the term "embedded librarianship" has been everywhere in the literature and in the conversation of our colleagues in the last decade. "Embedded" was borrowed from the description of war correspondents embedded with troops (p. 3). At its heart for librarians, the term refers to a desire for a deep integration of not just the library and the collections, but of the librarian (or archivist) in the classroom, curriculum, and research life of the university or college (p. 4). While this is the goal, we can see from the sixteen case studies presented here that the reality is not consistent—*embedded* can mean different things to different librarians.

The case studies in *Embedded Librarians* are all written by librarians and some instructional faculty about particular programs or courses that incorporate engagement that the authors define as embedded. The institutions highlighted come from among community colleges, colleges and universities, and professional programs. The first two case studies provide a literature review and a current summary of embedded librarianship. The remaining fourteen case

studies are divided into five parts highlighting different instructional environments: the first year experience; online; in and across disciplines; graduate and professional programs; and innovative spaces. The book's organization makes scanning and selecting a case study to match a particular instructional need easy. Each case study averages twelve pages in length, so the time investment for the reader is not large. As it is a collection of various projects, the writing quality varies and the book lacks an overall coherence. However, this does not detract from those case studies that present examples of a deeper integration of collections and librarians into the curriculum and the research life of a campus and areas where archivists can find ideas for experimentation.

The three best case studies, considering quality and applicability to the teaching archivist, focus on integration into an academic department, embedded research assistance in a major project, and embedded instruction and research assistance in a graduate research program. All three of these examples highlight both integration into the teaching function, but also into the research and learning functions of a particular course or department.

"Embedded and Embodied: Dance Librarianship within the Academic Department" from Arizona State University, provides an example of a librarian's integration into a department that houses a subject library. Visible and accessible at the point of need for both student and faculty researchers, integration of the librarian and collections occurs not only in the syllabus but also in the curriculum, and results in greater recognition by the research and teaching faculty of the valuable contributions of the librarian (p. 98). The author acknowledges that the specialized circumstances in this environment create the opportunity. The case study provides a rich example of the merit of deeply integrating a librarian within a department, and highlights why, despite the challenges, it is worth it.

While the outcome of this case study is aspirational for most of us, the examples in "Starring the Literature Review: An Integrative Approach" from Harvard University and "Kresge Library's Embedded Librarian Program: A Student-Centered Approach" from the University of Michigan provide familiar scenarios that could be more easily integrated into an archivist's current work. One is an example of collaborative instruction developed around a common information need. The other is a model of personalized group research reference. Both examples involve students in professional or graduate programs. However, they could be used in situations with undergraduates in capstone courses or research projects. Neither, however, would be scalable to a large enrollment course. For most of us involved in reference and instruction, this probably differs little from what we often provide in our own institutions. However, these case studies present examples of more integrated and collaborative environments for the librarians and the faculty from the outset. It's from

that development phase of these projects that archivists can learn the most. For example, notable in the University of Michigan case study is how integration has evolved over time to support its sustainability within the library. The program was established well over a decade ago and continues to evolve as the particular MBA project grows (p. 153). In the Harvard University case study, the identification of a research need and development of a solution in collaboration are examples to be followed. "The impetus for our course began with a student's request for a research methods class that included library research skills" (p. 188). We should recognize here that, in many cases, archivists are often more naturally integrated in research and instruction than are librarians. This is due in part not only to our unique collections, but to the particular way in which the majority of our collections need to be accessed and our audience's general lack of experience with this. We also come from a much more highly mediated tradition of reference provision than the majority of current librarians.

The remainder of the book has some valuable ideas to be gleaned by archivists. Much of the value will depend on readers' individual circumstances, their instructional needs, and the type of campuses or institutions where they work. As an example, the case study "More than a One-Shot: Innovative Faculty-Librarian Collaboration" includes extensive student assessment following the course, which was conducted in concert with assessment of similar courses involving a single library session instead of an embedded experience over the course of three semesters (p. 167). The research shows improved learning through increased instruction and mediation.

Many of the techniques echo general suggestions for providing good reference or good instruction and do not appear to be in any way unique to an embedded environment. The less relevant case studies are geared to an online-only presence. This lack of relevance is based on the fact that archivists and librarians have been consistently providing the majority of the examples given via Web pages, research guides, and course management systems since the introduction of those tools into standard instruction.

The implied premise of the book is that all librarians in higher education, no matter their charge or their institution, can be involved in embedded librarianship. However, in trying to build a tent big enough to hold everyone, the book dilutes its initial promise somewhat. It does, however, end up demonstrating that, regardless of circumstance, you can provide instruction or reference, often in innovative or engaging ways.

Some underlying themes can be taken away from this book. First, whether it's called "embedded" or not, the goal is to provide the most engaging learning environment and to foster learning within the classroom. True collaboration with faculty is a sometimes elusive but fundamental step in creating that

environment. True embeddedness is not generally scalable given the resources and work involved. Collaboration and embeddedness are also very tenuous, given their lack of scalability and the personal investment of the individuals involved. The book is littered with examples of projects that ended when a department changed curriculum, a faculty member or librarian left or was reassigned, or leadership decided to change the focus of learning outcomes. The examples discussed here require investment not just from individuals but from libraries, departments, and, in some cases, institutions. Embeddedness may not be for every librarian or archivist, nor is it for every class, but it involves a variety of ideas and opportunities for providing a richer experience for our students.

What the Best College Teachers Do

> Part of being a good teacher (not all) is knowing that you always have something new to learn—not so much about teaching techniques but about these particular students at this particular time and their particular sets of aspirations, confusions, misconceptions, and ignorance. (p. 174)

The next two books are very different from the first, not only in their construction, but also in their audience and aims. They are both important additions to the shelves of archivists trying to discover how best to improve the learning of their students. *What the Best College Teachers Do* is a truly inspirational book that studies and distills the thoughts and methods of some of the best college teachers. The book is written by Ken Bain, a professor best known for his research, teaching, and leadership roles in higher education. It is based on a fifteen-year, in-depth study of faculty from twenty-four universities and a variety of disciplines, including professional schools, that were recognized as having "achieved remarkable success in helping their students learn in ways that made a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on how those students think, act, and feel" (p. 5). The book is now ten years old but is widely considered a classic among those who study teaching in higher education or who want to improve their own teaching and learning environments.

While the title of the book is about "doing," the book itself is not a prescription—all of the best teachers do "x," and, therefore, if we all do "x," our students and we will have excellent educational experiences. First and foremost, no book on teaching can really successfully prescribe one way of teaching. All of us who have taught, and especially all of us who are learners, know that not everyone can or is comfortable teaching in the same way, nor do all learners respond equally to the same techniques and environments. This book presents itself as a guidebook, and, like any guidebook, readers can enjoy all of the vignettes and then decide which theories and practices to integrate into their work. Most of all, readers not only come away inspired by this glimpse into truly engaged

learning, but they will also see examples that bring to mind favorite teachers from the past or a desire to take classes from the faculty profiled!

The central premise of the book is to identify and explain the understanding, actions, and motivations of those teachers who were part of the research and recognized as being some of the best teachers. The book is organized around the function of teaching in a series of chapters: "Defining the Best"; "What Do They Know about How We Learn?"; "How Do They Prepare to Teach?"; "What Do They Expect of Their Students?"; "How Do They Conduct Class?"; "How Do They Treat Their Students?"; "How Do They Evaluate Their Students and Themselves?"; and "What Can We Learn from Them?" The book is best experienced as a whole, but the chapters and the index do allow readers to find the sections most relevant to their needs.

This book provides a deeper discussion of learning theory than some readers might have experienced previously. This is a crucial addition to the lexicon of archivists; just as we stress the importance of archival theory in guiding archival practice, so should we have at least a small grounding in learning theory upon which to base our teaching plans and instructional approaches. Readers will notice that the book little emphasizes or discusses teaching with technology. This is not necessarily evidence of its age (it does not seem dated). The key is to remember that this book is not about particular tools, but how to select and use particular tools. It is about what we want students to be able to understand, to do, to learn, or to make once they have left our classes, and it is about starting at that point and selecting the best tools to encourage this to happen. Along those lines, this book does not necessarily advocate for or against lecture as a teaching tool. Instead, it discusses and provides examples of what learning lecture fosters best, and the thinking behind what are considered good lectures, and it does the same for other modes of teaching (p. 99).

The second thing that readers will note is the focus on instruction in courses. While many of us have increasingly found opportunities to teach term-long research methods courses, or be closely integrated into term-long courses, the majority of instruction by archivists still occurs in an environment of, on average, fifty to ninety minutes per class in the course of a term. So, at first glance, the book may seem short on relevance to those with only limited time or control over a class. However, I encourage all archivists to take up this text and use it as it is meant to be used: as a guidebook. Think about integrating different learning styles into your session; when planning the session, instead of starting with the questions "what do I need to cover, and what do I want to show?," start with "what do I want the students to be able to understand, to do, or to make?," and let the coverage and the materials flow from there. For many readers, the most valuable chapter may be "How They Conduct Class," which

focuses on what goes on in the classroom, as it can be used no matter the time available.

What the Best College Teachers Do is not about overhauling your teaching entirely. It may happen organically over time, but that is not its premise. Instead, it's about learning from others about what works for their students and what works for them, and then trying to integrate incrementally those small things into your regular teaching practice. It also provides examples of how the best teachers approach experiments in teaching that do not work. Since not everything we do will work, it's about diagnosing the problems and either looking for solutions or replacing them with something new and understanding that failure is a part of experimentation and growth, but is not fatal.

This book counters the assumption that there is one best way to teach or one best type of teacher. Instead, it presents a series of encouraging examples and vignettes to demonstrate that all varieties of teachers in higher education can provide an environment that vastly improves the learning of their students. As archivists, we must bring to the table a desire to learn and to improve, and a willingness to try new things.

The Joy of Teaching

Teaching is only as successful as the learning it produces. (p. 133)

Of the four books reviewed, *The Joy of Teaching* is the closest to a teaching manual. However, while its premise does not have the inspirational tone of Bain's book, it is still engaging and well grounded in solid learning theory with a focus on student learning. It espouses a systematic approach to focusing on student learning when teaching. At the time the book was written, Filene was a professor of history at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill who had won six teaching awards at the university. He offers concrete but variable instructions and examples to use when it's time to take a new approach to preparing for or conducting a class. His book and Bain's are best read and used as complementary companions. In fact, Bain wrote the introduction to this book, which was published one year after his.

The Joy of Teaching is organized into three parts and broken into chapters. The three parts are "Premises," "Practices," and "Extra Curriculars." The chapters echo the topics in the previous book, but provide more step-by-step guidance and concrete actions. Chapters include "Understanding Students"; "Defining Aims and Outcomes"; "Constructing a Syllabus"; "Lecturing"; "Discussing"; "Broadening the Learning Environment"; "Evaluating and Grading"; and "Extra Curriculars." Throughout the book, foundational research on student learning

is included along with examples gleaned from the author's and other teachers' experience.

As with Bain's book, two general criticisms are that it rarely mentions teaching with technology, and it focuses on those who are teaching courses, instead of single sessions. These criticisms do not detract from the general value of the book to archivists, however. This is the book that archivists who teach longer, more substantive courses are looking for: what makes a good syllabus? How do you put one together? How do you make sure it is manageable over the period of a term or semester? The target audience of this book comprises new instructors who are developing and teaching their first courses. This makes it especially valuable for those who are new to teaching, but it includes practices and ideas that can be of interest and applicable as well to more experienced instructors, depending on their backgrounds.

This book can easily be read in its entirety, but it also serves well as a consulting volume with its linear organization, index, and footnotes and annotated bibliography as starting places for further exploration. The book begins by asking what type of teacher the reader is based on a series of questions (p. 11). The preliminary result will be revised and refined over time as the individual continues to teach. A chapter on student learning theory follows. Taken together, these prime readers to think more personally about teaching and about who they will be teaching before considering what to cover and how to put it all together. Some readers might be tempted to skip these parts, but they prompt thinking about oneself as a teaching archivist in ways that may not have been previously considered and then prompt readers to approach the subsequent chapters differently.

The next four chapters cover those areas at the heart of teaching: the planning and the doing. Depending on whether the reader is teaching a "one-shot," a course integrated into the collections, or a stand-alone research methods course, the sections will have varying relevance to the task at hand. Each chapter is filled not only with vignettes but with templates and examples that can be repurposed to the current task.

The final four chapters are of varying applicability to readers who are teaching archivists. The final two chapters on relating to students and balancing teaching with all of the other responsibilities of faculty will apply more or less depending on whether the reader is teaching full courses or individual classes. Chapter 7 discusses broadening the learning environment and explores techniques for teaching beyond lecture and discussion, including panel discussion, debates and role playing, case studies, polls or surveys, and public exhibits. In my own experience and in the literature, I have found that archivists use this realm of alternate forms of teaching well, often when teaching their own courses or those deeply integrated into the collections. The other chapter is

on evaluating and grading, which will apply variously depending on whether coursework and assignments are involved in the reader's class. However, every teaching archivist can find value in the section on evaluation, whether used at the start or the end of a class, or both. Evaluation allows an instructor to dispel any assumptions he or she or the faculty might have about a student's pre-instruction knowledge and assumptions, or to document postinstruction learning. The author provides short suggestions on how to gauge learning and on how well goals for student learning are actually met.

Of the four books reviewed here, *The Joy of Teaching* provides the most practical steps and solutions to answer the overall questions of what we want our students to learn and how we can best help them learn it. It would be best utilized in concert with the other texts mentioned here that are filled with case studies and vignettes, most especially the Bain book. This book provides the structure to integrate the others into your own teaching.

A New Culture of Learning

> The ability to play may be the single most important skill to develop for the twenty-first century. (Location 1623)

The final book in this review is in many ways unlike the rest; however, this helps it to act as a lens through which to view the other three books. *A New Culture of Learning* is about innovation and education. It answers the question of how we help our students to learn by looking at the learning environment writ large—all ages and all settings—and it uses as its springboard the role that networked technology can have in enabling expanded learning in this environment. The authors are John Seeley Brown, former chief scientist for the Xerox Corporation and director of its Palo Alto Research Center; prolific writer and thinker in the areas of teaching, learning, and innovation; and the author with Paul Duguid of *The Social Life of Information*; together with Douglas Thomas, a professor of technology, communication, and culture at the University of Southern California. The book's contributions are to look at student learning through a different lens and to challenge and provoke thinking about how teaching and education can evolve in environments where networked technology is applied. The book is arranged into nine chapters that establish and expand the central argument of the book, which is that the new culture of learning has at its center a focus on play, questioning, and imagination. All three areas are foundational to creating a culture to support innovation (pp. 18–19).

One theme also present in the Bain and Filene books is the dismissal of teaching as merely a transferring process model. This is the traditional model that posits teaching as purely the transference of knowledge from the teacher to the students, with evaluation set to judge the accuracy of transmission. The

main argument of the book is that the new culture of learning (play, questioning, and imagination) is created neither partly nor wholly in the classroom but by integrating the networked environment into the classroom or eliminating the classroom as the focus of the learning environment (pp. 35–36).

Many of the positions and arguments found in this book are similar to those in books on topics in innovation, leading change, and design thinking. The authors apply these arguments not only to education, but more especially to proposing an infrastructure for cultivating these skills and thinking through education. While it focuses on networked technology, every archivist will see in this book examples of how our digital collections and online exhibits form the environment for this type of engaged learning across all types of users. Other examples that archivists can extrapolate from the book are in the use of the online collective, projects that bring together learners in an environment where they participate by adding knowledge. This harnessing of the collective in peer-to-peer learning is part of the new culture of learning (pp. 52–53). While setting aside for now the larger issues in the profession of how archivists value and interpret this input, it should be recognized as part of a larger learning environment that we are creating.

Outside of the networked realm, collections can be used in teaching in innovative ways to stimulate play and questioning, both primary aims of education in the book, but discussed here only in the networked realm. In chapter 3 on embracing change, the authors describe "a new kind of reading practice—evaluate a contested piece of knowledge and decide for yourself how you want to interpret it" (p. 47). Any teaching archivist who has ever led students through an exercise of reading and integrating primary sources into their research will recognize here a familiar goal and outcome. Archivists could no doubt give other examples of how they foster these skills and mindsets through their teaching and learning environments. We might not think of what students do as play, but experimentation and stimulating the imagination occur when students are assigned to take items from our collections and use them as foundations for creative writing projects, art, or other experimental or experiential creation.

Unfortunately, this book bases its argument on an educational environment that, while common, does not take into account the innovative and learner-centered teaching environments that we glimpse in the previous three books reviewed in this essay. This dichotomy between the traditional learning environment and a networked technology may leave readers wishing they could sit around a table with the authors of all of these books to discuss how learner-centered teaching environments can inform the discussion of networked technology. This text would not lend itself to immediate practical application, but instead might challenge and provoke ideas about how teaching with primary sources could evolve to address this new culture of learning.

The New Culture of Learning is a call to a new way of thinking about education. At its root, however, it is still looking at the fundamental question of how we help improve the learning of our students. At first glance, it seems to provide a model that could be difficult to embrace, but when looking more deeply at what is proposed, and looking at it through both a networked and a traditional lens, we can see areas where teaching archivists are already making strides to spur new teaching innovation.

The four books profiled here were brought together as a way to look at the literature outside the archives profession to explore ideas that teaching archivists can learn and integrate into their practices. This essay is also based on the premise that those of us who teach are always searching for ways to improve, to increase engagement with our collections, and to integrate new ideas into our teaching. Also, as faculty and others on campus discover the role our collections can play in their goals for increasing and enhancing the research opportunities of all students across the curriculum, we have more opportunities to teach and communicate the value of our collections.

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Archives and Archivists 2: Current Trends, New Voices

The Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) allegedly stated: "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." In *Archives and Archivists 2: Current Trends, New Voices*, editors Ailsa C. Holland and Elizabeth Mullins capture the enthusiasm of University College Dublin (UCD) School of History and Archives postgraduate students engaged in research since the publication of the first volume *Archives and Archivists* (2006). The first book, published as a celebration of the pioneering role of UCD's thirty-five-year postgraduate diploma in archival studies, contains the works of recent archives school graduates and seasoned professionals. It does not attempt to arrange the essays within a thematic framework and is designed primarily to stimulate debate and foster discussion among archivists in Ireland. Moving beyond the filling of a commemorative bucket in *Archives 2*, Holland and Mullins, accomplished lecturers at the UCD School of History and Archives, have edited a volume by recently qualified archival practitioners, who through their passionate, well-written