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Summer 6-2015

Know the Lingo: How ILEAD Ohio Influenced Library Collaboration and Discovery for Patrons

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Repository Citation

McIntosh, Jessica Crossfield; Krumsee, Kirstin; Zaveloff, Julie; and Zoladz, Derek, "Know the Lingo: How ILEAD Ohio Influenced Library Collaboration and Discovery for Patrons" (2015). *Library Faculty & Staff Scholarship*. 6.

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Know the Lingo: How ILEAD Ohio Influenced Library Collaboration and Discovery for Patrons

Introduction to ILEAD Ohio

The inaugural ILEAD USA program took place over nine months in 2013. Originally titled ILEAD U, this continuing education and professional development opportunity was previously open to Illinois librarians only. Funded by a Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program Grant through the Institute of Museum and Library Studies, the original goal of ILEAD U was to “help library staff understand and respond to user needs through the application of participatory technology tools.” (Insight 2010). According to the Illinois State Library, in 2012 they received \$470,000 in additional grant money in order to expand the program. ILEAD U became ILEAD USA, and now in 2013 included teams from Colorado, Iowa, Ohio and Utah (Insight 2012).

The ILEAD program is made up of three different types of participants: team members, mentors, and instructors. All teams must have five members representing no less than two different types of libraries and at least three different individual libraries/organizations. After a competitive application process in which all applicants were required to create their team and submit a shared community need along with an initial project idea, accepted participants from all five states met simultaneously over three three-day retreats. Our team, Lost in Translation, was made up of five librarians from four different Ohio Library institutions (OHIONET, State Library of Ohio, Otterbein University, and Columbus State Community College). ILEAD Ohio held in-person sessions at the Deer Creek State Park Lodge in Mt. Sterling, Ohio. With the exception of a few live broadcasts of keynote speakers made possible via streaming video technology, all programming and presentations were conducted in Mt. Sterling.

Prior to the first retreat, each team was assigned a mentor to help guide their team through the ILEAD process. In addition, there was an instructor core at each retreat, which consisted of Ohio-based library professionals selected for “their skill and experience teaching concepts and their experience integrating technology and project management ideas in the library world” (State Library of Ohio 2014).

In-between the in-person sessions, teams were required to work on their project, as well as attend various intersession continued education opportunities. Team Lost in Translation had several in-person meetings and relied heavily on an online project management tool for communication purposes. Participating in ILEAD USA is free, but all individuals had to make a nearly yearlong commitment. The ILEAD program emphasizes the importance of fostering leaders within the profession, and commitment to the process is what helps librarians learn to solve shared challenges through collaboration.

Shared Community Need

From the beginning, a major goal of each ILEAD team was to determine a community need that spanned multiple libraries. This area of the project took the most thought and care as we discussed what greater needs surrounded the library community and general society. We also faced challenges as each of our communities was made up of different demographics and each library served their patrons in various capacities. An additional unique aspect of ILEAD is the direct impact placed on the end user. It focused the teams to not only engage users to identify needs, but to involve “user representatives to provide critical feedback during the development” of their prospective tools (Webjunction 2014). This allowed for cooperation and collaboration between the team and their user representatives.

The need we decided to focus on was the miscommunication and language variation between patron and librarian. Librarians speak with a very specific jargon that isn't familiar to many of our patrons. We saw a need for a way to translate the language that we use in our profession to ensure that it is not a barrier to our patrons finding the information they seek. We all encounter patrons that don't understand the language that's a part of our profession, whether that is via the physical space, electronic resources, catalogs, or just access to information in general.

This isn't a new or surprising fact. All patrons, ranging from millennials to baby boomers struggle with using library jargon and information seeking skills are changing constantly (Connaway et al. 2008). Many of the generic-based terms we use in the library field have much higher levels of recognition to the public than Boolean logic or truncation. It is up to the professionals in the field to understand behaviors and find the best way to serve them (Hutcherson 2004).

As working librarians, we've all had to defend the need for libraries and librarians in today's Google-centric world. This issue of language and communication with our patrons is the dividing line between the new and old approaches within our profession. If we get the chance to develop resources for our perceived community need it could be an exciting opportunity to help make the argument that our profession is more relevant now than ever before. Our combined underserved groups need our participation in the online environment, because it is essential that we meet them where they are to address their information needs. It's also the most efficient way for us to reach the majority of our combined communities by creating a centralized location for access.

Building a Mobile Application

After our determination of the community need, the next challenge was to come up with a technology tool to address that identified need. Our team wanted to explore technologies that would help break down language barriers and enable our communities to find what they want.

One of the fundamental challenges facing our shared community is identifying a sufficiently acceptable access point for browsing our library's physical print collection. Esoteric arrangements of alphanumeric characters confront the user on library end caps and on the spines of books that line the shelves. The knowledge required to translate these puzzling 'call numbers' into meaningful, and actionable, communications is absent from some members of the community of library users. On the other hand, the adoption of mobile devices and tablets capable of running apps is on the rise. For those in the community that are self-service minded, positioning a translation app in the palm of their hands was openly welcomed. While the risk of losing the specificity and meaning of the library-specific terminology is evident, the tradeoff is to encourage a larger group of our community to feel comfortable browsing the library's collection independently.

The primary goal of the mobile application *Know the Lingo* is to facilitate serendipitous browsing of a library's physical book collection. Secondary goals for the project included: (1) a reduction in the use of library jargon to open up the app to a wider audience, (2) provide more meaningful subject categories to our community, (3) utilize visual representations that add a layer of clarity and meaningfulness to each subject category, and (4) provide an educational area for community members that wanted to learn more about library-specific terminology and practices.

Library jargon can create a significant barrier to full utilization and engagement with the library's collections from some members of the community. Heavy reliance on arcane terminology can create an intimidating environment for those who are unacquainted with traditional library structures. Lowering the access point to library collections by reducing the vocabulary requirements became a priority. Community representatives were consulted throughout the process of development, providing guidance on the direction of development and feedback on the clarity of the language being utilized in the app.

Subject categories were characterized by community representatives as unclear and overly detailed for effective browsing. Questions of identifying the 'sweet spot' for the number of categories to include, while minimizing the risk of oversimplification proved to be a challenge. Settling on 19 major categories, these groupings would provide the top-level navigation for the application. The granularity of coverage and depth was restricted to two levels of user decision-making, with the third level reserved for a response of the app of the location to begin browsing for a library items. The final construction of categories shared a resemblance to the division of categories in a traditional bookstore.

Visual icons were employed to add an additional layer of meaning to the subject categories. Icons were selected based upon common usability heuristics of familiarity, concreteness, simplicity, meaningfulness, and semantic distance (Ng & Chan 2009). Written feedback from our community representatives was combined with a small

sample survey of individuals from the community to construct the final associations between the selected icons and their associated subject categories.

At the outset to the project, the iOS environment was our exclusive target for the app. Deciding that this was too limiting and exclusive, common web development technologies (HTML, CSS, and JavaScript) quickly arose to the surface as viable alternatives. Broadening the range of devices for our app served to let the community know that we were respecting their personal decision on hardware and responding to their requests for a broader approach to development. To simplify the development and utilize one code-base, PhoneGap was used to package the deliverables. TestFlight was used to distribute beta versions of the app to community members for feedback, corrections, additions, and overall functionality.

The Future of *Know the Lingo*

The *Know the Lingo* app is currently available in the iTunes and Google Play stores. The code used to develop the app can be viewed and freely edited in the open source Github and we would be happy to see the app expanded upon. It is available at <https://github.com/dzoladz/know-the-lingo>.

At the conclusion of ILEAD there were still a number of areas where we would have liked to further develop the app. Rather than just having a feature to drill down to more specific subjects, we'd most like to have a search function in the app allowing users to provide even more natural language to reach their area of interest.

Other areas we'd like to see for development include the possibility for library specific branding, user keyword tagging for subject areas and even the potential for camera integration allowing a user to view a call number on an end cap and receive a translation of what that section of books might cover. We hope the app will continue to evolve in the coming years, either via our own work or with the help of the library community at large.

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