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Library 2.0 International Conference  
March 2018

Design Thinking: How Librarians Are Incorporating It into Their Practice Mini-Conference  
Written Summary and Reflection

In order to better understand how information professionals engage in the global information community, I attended a Library 2.018 international virtual conference entitled *Design Thinking: How Librarians are Incorporating It into Their Practice* that was held via Blackboard Collaborate on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The mini-conference featured a one hour keynote address and a thirty-minute closing address. In between, attendees could attend three thirty minute panels of their choosing from a lineup of nine panels total. In the following reflection, I'll discuss the speakers and themes of the keynote including the international perspective on library practice that was provided and then look at the three panels which I attended including Design Thinking for Student Success, Design Thinking to Plan Library Courses, and Design Thinking in Theory and Practice to Improve Upon and Sustain Library Communications. The conference was organized by Steve Hargadon of Library 2.0 in partnership with Steven Bell of Temple University who moderated the opening panel and served as the closing keynote speaker. Additionally, San Jose State University's School of Information was the founding conference sponsor. Through use of the chat feature on Blackboard Collaborate, attendees were able to share their locations which included Australia, Sweden, New Zealand, Canada, Puerto Rico, Argentina, Nepal, Fiji, London, and more in addition to the continental United States evidencing the degree to which virtual conferences can truly meet the information needs and interests of a global information community.

The featured panelists during the opening keynote address included Rachel Ivy Clarke, an assistant professor at the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University. Clarke's focus has been on how to integrate design thinking into Library and Information Science education and she provided a useful introduction to what design thinking is and how libraries benefit from its application. "Libraries are inherently sites of design," stated Clarke during her presentation. She elaborated by acknowledging that librarians and information professionals are constantly designing within their profession in that they design classification systems, story times, policies, services, and experiences in addition to those responsible for web design, instructional design, and even interior design. Clarke suggests that as such, all librarians need to learn to think like designers. She then identified and detailed the four stages of design thinking (with acknowledgement that some design thinkers recognize the process as having five stages). Identifying the problem is the first step in applying design thinking to a project, program, or institution and that identification is best achieved through empathizing with users including observing their behavior and immersing oneself in their environment and experience to best understand how they engage with the variable under analysis. Gathering and synthesizing the data from this initial experience is useful in noticing the gaps that exist between current practice and ideal practice. Following identification of the problem is the ideation stage wherein brainstorming on how best to solve the problem occurs. Clarke emphasizes that the focus here is on quantity of ideas, not quality and that in the ideation stage, there are no bad ideas. Once potential solutions are acknowledged, the process enters the creation stage which usually involves prototypes or pilot solutions. The prototype stage is where design thinking may differ from other philosophies on problem solving in that the prototypes are intended to be quick and

easy to execute and disposable if necessary. Significantly, not a lot of time and money should be spent on executing on an idea from the ideation stage. Once the prototype is implemented, evaluation occurs wherein project participants assess the outcome of implementation and reflect on its success. Usually, this process involves the identification of new problems and subsequently, the generation of new ideas. Design thinking is cyclical and iterative but notably is driven by empathy in the identification stage, quantity over quality in the ideation stage, low risk and disposable prototypes in the creation stage, and reflection toward revision in the evaluation stage. Clarke concludes that design thinking works best when there's diversity in collaboration and ultimately will lead to information professionals who are more effective problem solvers which benefits their organizations and communities.

After Clarke spoke, Sidsel Bech-Petersen was introduced. Bech-Petersen is the Head of Projects and Co-Creation for Aarhus Public Libraries at Dokk1 in Denmark. In addition to supporting the transformation of Aarhus Public Library into Dokk1, Bech-Petersen also worked in partnership with IDEO and Chicago Public Library since 2013 to create a Design Thinking for Libraries toolkit which has just been made available. Bech-Petersen stated that instrumental to the transformation of her library was the need to change mindset and re-envision the library as being for people not books – that is, the library space is first and foremost, a user space. Echoing Clark, Bech-Petersen maintained that effective design thinking puts people first and is human-centered and that to identify problems and solutions, one needs to immerse herself in the user's experience. Bech-Petersen added that in designing Dokk1, the library staff also reached out to non-library users and in some cases, interviewed them in their homes to better understand why they were not using the library. She encourages 'looking up and looking out' when approaching design thinking to provide a user-driven experience. Additionally, she recommends recruiting

experts in problem-solving for collaboration even if they're from outside the library field, targeting behaviors rather than age groups in designing spaces and programs, and prioritizing genuine experiences for the user in relationship to the institution. Chicago Public Library's Greg Diaz was the last person on the panel to speak and discussed his experience in applying design thinking to the prototyping and implementation of CPL's Games on the Go initiative. Like Clarke and Bech-Petersen, Diaz emphasized the importance of empathy in considering user experience as well as the importance of providing genuine or authentic experiences through the library.

After the opening keynote concluded, attendees logged into the room for their first panel. I attended the presentation by Amy Vecchione and Karina Smith from Boise State University who demonstrated how they applied design thinking to course design for a course that is provided for students who are on academic probation or were dismissed from the university for poor academic performance but have returned. The speakers included that student retention is a significant problem for BSU and their four-year retention rate is currently 19% while their goal for 2018 is to increase that to 25%. Vecchione said that with Smith's contribution, she engaged the students she taught in Academic Studies 102 (a course specifically designated for those in academic distress) in design thinking and guided them through the four-stage process toward restructuring the class through implementation of their own ideas. Part of this process included the students thinking of ways to improve their situation and interviewing each other to build empathy across the class. Additionally, Vecchione said that key to their project was students communicating stories of their success to others on campus including institutional stakeholders. The experience of applying design thinking to instructional design has allowed Vecchione and

Smith to offer design thinking workshops across campus such that its praxis can inform and transform other programs and services at Boise State University.

The second presentation I attended also looked at the application of design thinking to instructional design. Claire Nickerson, the Learning Initiatives and OER Librarian at Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kansas inherited a graduate-level information literacy course and redesigned it to “use a more varied format and educational resources and to be more ambitious in its coverage” (Nickerson, 2018). Introduction to Graduate Liberal Studies is an online course taught through the library to first year graduate studies. Nickerson sought to redesign the course because she felt the previous iteration was both boring and dated. Toward her redesign, Nickerson employed design thinking by first acknowledging the main problems with the course, then brainstorming new topics to cover within the course during her ideation stage. “During the ‘prototype’ phase, in the fall of 2016, the course re-launched with new learning objectives and a varied collection of zero-cost course materials” (Nickerson, 2018). Upon inquiry from attendees, Nickerson said that she’d be happy to share the materials and resources she used in her course redesign. When I followed up with her via email a few days after the conference, she quickly responded with her list of materials and course syllabus. The evaluation stage was conducted through student feedback and has continued to change iteratively in successive semesters.

The final presentation I attended featured Nelly Cancilla, the Communications and Liaison Librarian at University of Toronto Mississauga, demonstrating how she used design thinking to improve upon and sustain library communications. In the first stage, Cancilla identified the problem in her library as an inconsistent and unclear communication flow internally that impacted how the library communicated externally to their institution and community. During the ideation stage, Cancilla stated they performed an environmental scan of

other libraries (not just their own) and rethought staff and virtual spaces as well as experimented with workflow models. The key here and the way in which design thinking may differ from other strategic or internal planning processes is that any potential solution is considered even those which may in other circumstances seem too outlandish or illogical. The prototype to improve communication throughout the university's library included using Blackboard Collaborate to create a staff portal through which people could not only communicate but also share resources and standards. For example, the marketing department has recently created a style guide for the library's branding which included CSS code for fonts and colors to be used in all branding materials as well as best social media practices but there'd previously not be a centrally located place in which to house that information so the portal served as that space. Cancilla said that while prototypes can be thought of disposable, that in their design thinking, they wanted to seek sustainable solutions – that is, communication channels that didn't rely on institutional memory to maintain. For evaluation, the project participants encouraged and asked for staff feedback during every stage of the process. The next aspect of their plan Cancilla hopes to implement is the design and integration of a communications guide which can also be accessed through the staff portal.

After 90 minutes (or three panels), the attendees reconvened in the main Blackboard Collaborate room for the closing keynote address given by Steven Bell. Bell highlighted the availability of the Design Thinking for Libraries toolkit and suggested that design thinking can be a useful and palatable way to engage change because it's not a top-down model of problem solving but instead requires contribution from everyone in the community. To gauge assessment of the conference, Bell included participation in five polls which posed different questions

regarding attendees' likelihood to adopt design thinking. He left conference participants with one final thought on design thinking – “fall in love with the problem, not the solution” (Bell, 2018).

### Reflection

This was the first professional conference I'd ever attended either virtual or on-site and I wasn't quite sure what to expect but I found the experience very rewarding. I feel as though I gained a lot of valuable information from a wide variety of professional sources through my computer screen while sitting in my living room. This experience reaffirmed for me the opportunities for professional development that are made possible by technology and the Web. Additionally, observing how many attendees (and panel participants) live and work in countries other than the United States highlighted how a global information community can be fostered through web technologies as well to the benefit of all community members. Because my chosen career path is academic librarianship, I selected three panels that focused on academic library environments though all types of libraries were represented within the presentations. I was additionally happy that two of the panels focused on instruction specifically as that is my field of interest. I will definitely attend future international virtual conferences in the future as I feel they're worthwhile opportunities to engage in professional development. Further, attending this virtual conference has made me less apprehensive about attending on-site conferences in the future as well.