

Training *Librarians of Tomorrow*: Collaborations between Brooklyn Public Library's Teen Internship Program and Pratt Institute's MSLIS Program

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the *Librarians of Tomorrow* project, a teen internship program at Brooklyn Public Library that engages Master of Library and Information Science students from Pratt Institute in New York City. The teen internship program draws from the local youth population, with one goal being to build a pipeline of future librarians drawn from the community. A second feature of the program is that it provides Library and Information Science graduate students with a practice-based learning experience in the highly diverse and global context of Brooklyn. The *Librarians of Tomorrow* project, in collaboration with Pratt Institute's School of Information, offers one example of how to bring a global perspective to LIS education. The paper discusses the methods for integrating this learning experience into course content within the MSLIS degree and concludes with preliminary observations about the Pratt/*Librarians of Tomorrow* collaboration and the practice-based learning experience.

TOPICS

Education of information professionals, public libraries, young adult services

INTRODUCTION

The conference theme for ALISE 2019 asks LIS researchers to consider learning in a global context. As the call for this conference suggests, “education for library and information science (LIS) is truly a global enterprise” (ALISE). This is certainly true for the information disciplines but we, the authors, offer an observation: Sometimes the global enterprise is right next door, in your own backyard. We ask, how might a LIS program help its students gain a deeper understanding of the international diversity within their own communities? One method is through practice-based learning experiences, where LIS students get out into the community and learn about diversity, cultural competencies, and global contexts *in the field*. This paper describes the

role of Pratt Institute in developing a practice-based learning experience for MSLIS students within the *Librarians of Tomorrow (LoT)* project at the Brooklyn Public Library (BPL). It discusses the methods for integrating the learning experience into course content within the MSLIS degree and concludes with preliminary observations about the *LoT*/Pratt collaboration and the practice-based learning experience.

THE PROJECT

The *LoT* project is a teen internship program at BPL, currently directed by Jennifer Thompson, the second author of this paper. The *LoT* project began in 2017, with Pratt Institute as a collaborator. The project is nearing the end of its second year and has engaged 115 teen interns and 12 MSLIS students. The teen internship program draws from the local youth population, with one goal being to build a pipeline of future librarians drawn from the community. A second feature of the program, and the one that concerns this paper, is that it provides library and information graduate students with a practice-based learning experience in the highly diverse and global context of Brooklyn.

The *LoT* project, in collaboration with Pratt Institute's School of Information, offers one example of how to bring a global perspective to LIS education. Brooklyn is one of five boroughs within the global city of New York, USA, and is an excellent example of our local/global principle. There are many languages spoken by Brooklyn residents, including Spanish, Chinese, Russian, French Creole, Italian, Polish, French, Arabic, Indic languages and Urdu (World Population Review). This linguistic diversity suggests that many in the population have strong links to places beyond the United States. Indeed, New York City is home to 3.1 million immigrants (World Population Review). Thirty-eight per cent of Brooklyn residents are foreign born (New York City). In this environment of diversity, LIS education must consider how to help students gain the cultural agility necessary for serving newcomers to the community - to understand how to best serve people who have moved from afar and bring their global experiences with them. The Pratt Institute's School of Information, through its collaboration with BPL's *LoT* project, offers an opportunity for students to experience issues associated with teen programming at the library, including the cultural contexts of teens. While not every teen involved with the *LoT* project will necessarily be from a family of newcomers, the diverse make-up of Brooklyn's population ensures a high probability that a certain number will be. BPL does not collect information about ethnicity or nationality, but they do know how many languages their teen interns speak. Out of the 115 teens who have participated in the *LoT* project, 70 (61%) speak a language other than English. Students in the MSLIS program at Pratt Institute have the opportunity to interact directly with these teens and gain practical, hands-on experience. Figure 1 below presents the timeline of Pratt student activities on the *Librarians of Tomorrow* Project.

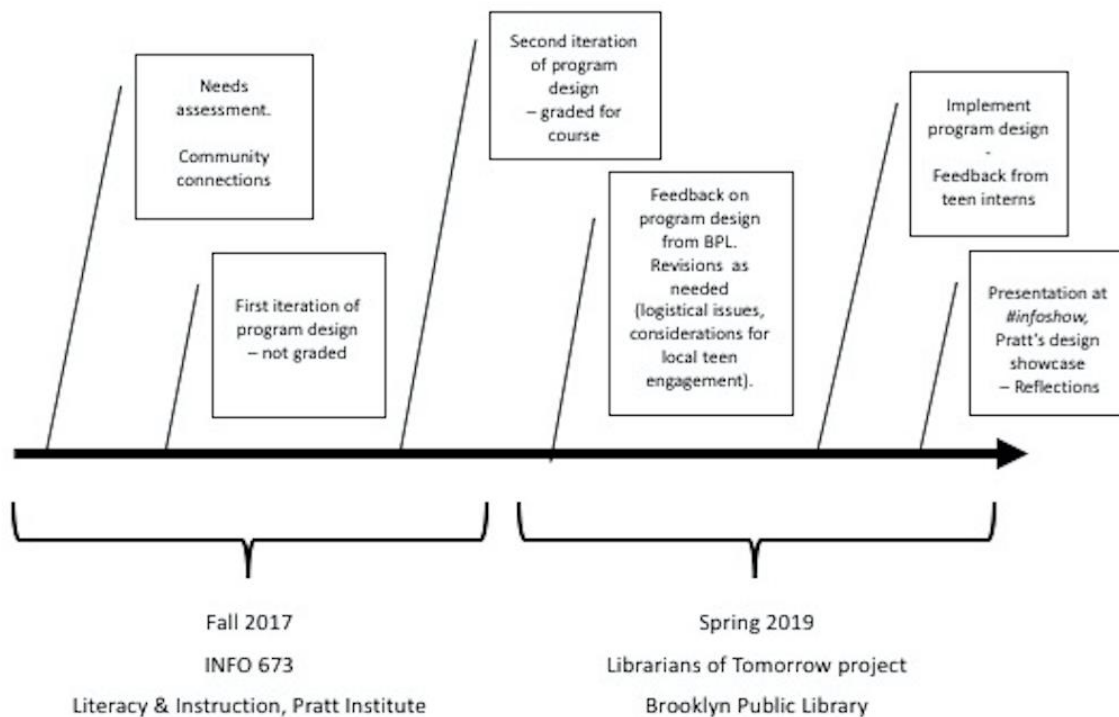


Figure 1: Timeline of Pratt student activities on the *Librarians of Tomorrow* Project.

For the past two years, Pratt Institute's role has been to connect MSLIS students with the *LoT* project through a design project in the class *Literacy and Instruction* (INFO 673), a course framed by Freire's critical pedagogy (1968). During the fall term, students work to deconstruct enactments of power, culture, and social justice within the context of learning in libraries through the design of a teen library program that targets literacy (print, visual, digital, data, etc.), but with the understanding that it is a prototype to be further refined in the field. In pairs, students develop a program prototype, applying the principles of outcomes-based planning and evaluation (Dresang, Gross, & Holt, 2006). Students can then elect to join the *LoT* team, working with Jennifer Thompson, the project's director at BPL, throughout the spring term, thus allowing them to bring their program to the intended audience – teens living in the five boroughs of New York City. LIS students are paid a nominal stipend supplied by the grant to facilitate the programs they designed, with the *LoT* teen interns serving as both audience and critic. The programs are presented multiple times with different groups of teens, allowing the LIS students to adjust their programs based on feedback from the field. LIS students reflect on their learning experiences at #infoshow, Pratt's annual showcase of student design work.



Figure 2: A Zine created by a teen intern at Brooklyn Public Library for *Tell Your Story! Zine Making Workshop*, a workshop developed and facilitated by Pratt students Emma Karin Eriksson and Manuela Aronofsky.

CONCLUSION

It is rare that design projects in a LIS class can be tested in the field with the very audience for which they were intended, especially when that audience is under 18. Our integrated approach helped to close the circle between theory and practice. Although not an internship in the traditional sense, where students complete a formal term of fieldwork as part of their degree requirements (Huggins, 2017), the *LoT* practice-based learning experience affords an easy entry point into experiential learning. It is not, however, meant to replace a full field experience. Rather, it provides a meaningful goal when completing a class assignment and an opportunity to gain an authentic taste of teen services, explore critical approaches to learning and culture, and do so in a highly diverse library setting. Student feedback thus far has been positive, with one student noting in the course evaluation that the real-life component of the learning task made it more concrete and understandable.

The principle difficulties we have encountered relate to logistics and the alignment of schedules and timelines for two large institutions. This disconnect may have prevented students from spending more time learning from the teens, discouraging a deeper knowledge about Brooklyn's diverse communities. Nevertheless, the theory-to-practice continuum afforded through the BPL/Pratt Institute collaboration enables a rich learning environment for LIS students.

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