Nurture Creative Thinking Skills

Dorothy Stoltz and James “Pat” Carlisle

Can librarians dedicate themselves to discover, cultivate, and activate their creative thinking skills to balance “too many projects and not enough time” and not become workaholics? Absolutely, yes!

Creative-thinking leader Edward de Bono, author of *Six Thinking Hats*, has developed an outstanding approach to effective thinking. In his book, *Masterthinker’s Handbook*, he states, “Far too many people believe that thinking is a matter of intelligence. If you are intelligent, you are automatically a good thinker. This is not so... If we treat thinking as a skill, then we can improve thinking just as we can improve any skill through attention and practice.”

When we pursue creative thinking, we open up our mind and explore possibilities. Creative thinking is a mental skill that enriches our ability to add value to decision-making, planning, and responding to challenges – as well as enhancing our ability to stay calm, reduce irritability, and take obstacles in stride.

The *Six Thinking Hats* approach works by asking us to put on six metaphorical, colorful hats, one at a time, in order to evoke different thinking abilities. This comprehensive thinking process makes room for everyone’s voice, and the *Six Thinking Hats* method can be used individually or in teams.

Have something to say?
Send questions, comments, thoughts, and future articles to editor@alalearning.org

Continued as Creative Thinking, page 7
LearnRT at ALA Annual

LearnRT Executive Board Meeting
Saturday, June 24 - 9am (CT)
In-person - McCormick Place, W177
and via Zoom (check ALA Connect for the link)

LearnRT President’s Program
Saturday, June 24 - 10:30am (CT)
Work/Life Balance for Library Leaders Who Do It All with Cindy Fesemyer
McCormick Place, W187a

LearnRT Training Showcase
Sunday, June 25 - 2:30pm (CT) - McCormick Place, W196a
Join us and visit presenter tables to learn best practices in training and development, get entered to win prizes, and enjoy some refreshments!
President’s Message: Amanda Standerfer

It’s been my pleasure to serve as the LearnRT President this year! We’ve worked to build a “post-COVID” LearnRT and I hope to see many of you at the re-launched Training Showcase on June 25 at 2:30pm at ALA Annual. The Training Showcase is a great place to meet others who are supporting training and continuing education in their libraries and throughout the library sector.

As I work with libraries across the U.S. to develop strategic plans, I’ve noticed a trend of including an internally-facing goal related to staff development. The dark days of the COVID shut down taught us that we need to invest in our staff to ensure vibrant, robust team dynamics that are flexible and respond to the many fires that pop up on a daily basis (big and small!).

When I meet with staff members during a strategic planning process, two things always come up: orientation and cross training. So much has changed the past three years that we need to revisit how we are welcoming new staff into our libraries and ensuring they have the skills to confidently carry out their jobs. But on-the-job learning doesn’t end there! Every library needs a cross training plan that maps out critical roles and processes and lists who knows how to assume those roles if staff members are absent or get shuffled around. It sounds daunting, but we can start by taking an inventory of what is already happening during orientation and how we are already cross training. Once we have a clear picture of the current state, we can brainstorm what the future might look like and how we can get there. Orientation checklists? Department-level cross training plans? So many possibilities!

I know LearnRT members are thinking about these topics and more! Please share on ALA Connect what your library has done to evolve orientation and cross training in the past several years. Better yet, join us in Chicago and share in-person! Hope to see you there!
Incoming President Introduction: 
Amy Eiben

Happy Annual, LearnRT!

This is just a brief introduction, as I hope to meet many of you in Chicago or via Zoom. Please join us at any of our sponsored events, including the newly relaunched Training Showcase!

I have been a member of the Learning Round Table since joining ALA in 2014. I had the pleasure of serving on the Pat Carterette Continuing Education Grant Committee from 2018-2020.

When elected VP in April 2022, I was working as the general System Consultant for Southeast Kansas Library System (SEKLS). My role at SEKLS was to provide support to library directors and boards of trustees through consultation and access to quality continuing education. I have since returned to a public library role, serving as Assistant Branch Manager in the Johnson County Library system in northeastern Kansas. In this role, I lean heavily on some of those same strengths that I used at SEKLS: advocating for staff development, recognizing individual skills and needs, fostering confidence to build independence, and celebrating successes.

LearnRT has a mission that speaks directly to my values, and I look forward to providing what support I can offer as President to help our Round Table rebuild and thrive.

Please feel free to reach out via email at eibena@jocolibrary.org to share your ideas, ask about ways to help, or to send photos of dogs you’ve met.

(Amy’s dog Georgia, pictured below)
As a new librarian of the reference department at the Delta State University Library in Cleveland, Mississippi, I was asked to design a training program for student workers as their new supervisor. This was a new type of task for me, but I drew upon my own experience as a student worker years ago, at another institution of higher learning.

As a recipient of student aid, I was also eligible for the Federal Work-Study Program, and I was hopeful for an opportunity to work part-time in some capacity of academia, perhaps in an office or even in the library - my favorite place, of course. It didn’t take me long to figure out that those were plum student positions, and as an in-coming Freshman I got what was left – cleaning guest rooms at a dorm. Yes, it was a job, but it certainly did not accomplish one of the main goals of the work-study program, which per the Federal Student Aid website should “emphasize employment in civil education and work related to your course study whenever possible.”

Keeping this in mind, and knowing that I owe the DSU Library the best student worker training program I could create, I developed a step-by-step training program that not only fits the needs of the reference department, but also translates to practical work experience that helps prepare these future graduates for their entry into the full-time workforce. Firstly, I met with each of the four student workers assigned to me, to determine what major courses of study they were pursuing, and understand their expectations of duties as library student workers.

Continued as Reference on next page
We reviewed the Federal Student Worker website’s description of the program, then I created a checklist of responsibilities for the library student worker position, entitled the “Reference Student Worker Job Description Review.” For the first few weeks of a new semester, even returning student workers were required to address each area in this review, starting with the “Performing Public Service Duties at the Reference Desk” section.

Serving patrons is a major part of the jobs of those who work in the reference departments of libraries, and that is especially true in a busy academic library. Reference and instructional librarians are teachers, and as such, they answer basic questions and provide research assistance to patrons and hold library instruction sessions to groups of students.

It is not uncommon for a librarian to be actively assisting a student with scholarly research while the desk telephone is ringing or someone is needing help with printing. Student workers are vitally important helpers in such an environment, but they need to be fully trained on what they are expected to do. This particular section of the review includes training student workers on properly answering the phone and taking messages. Additionally, it covers each library policy, like the computer use policy and security awareness. Tours of the library are included in this portion of the initiative, too, so that student workers are familiar with the different library departments, their locations, and what services they provide.

Next is the “Duties and Responsibilities” module. In this module, the student workers indicate that they understand how to correctly reshelve print books using the Library of Congress Cataloging System after watching selected instructional videos on the topic. This is followed by reshelving demonstrations by me, then ongoing spot-checks after the students returned books to the shelves. Moreover, the student workers know that once they have been thoroughly trained, they are empowered to proactively check for books to return to the stacks as soon as they come back on duty, without waiting to be told to do so. The two remaining segments are the “Absenteeism Policy” and the “Use of Personal Cell Phones and Electronic Devices Policy”, which are standard in many jobs. In other words, the students need to be present, punctual, and ready to work, and avoid using their electronic devices while on duty.

Those are great work habits for a library and beyond.
It is quite effective in resolving issues such as:

- How can you find the right balance between too many projects and not enough time?
- How can you draw people of all ages to use and enjoy the library more regularly?
- How can you demonstrate to stakeholders that the library and its activities have a positive impact – educationally and economically?

The Six Thinking Hats

- Blue (The Conductor’s Hat) is the control hat; setting the agenda, focus, and sequence; ensuring that guidelines are observed; asking for summaries and decisions; and planning action.
- Green (The Creative Hat) is for generating new ideas, alternatives, possibilities, and new concepts.
- Red (The Hat for the Heart) is about feelings and intuition. The red hat invites feelings without justification.
- Yellow (The Optimist’s Hat) is used to generate a positive view of things. It looks for the benefits and values.
- Black (The Judge’s Hat) promotes caution and identifies risk and obstacles. It is used for critical judgment and must give logical reasons for concerns.
- White (The Factual Hat) asks what information and knowledge you have, what more you need, and where you get it.

Join us for “Thinking to Produce Results” at ALA in Chicago
June 26, 2023, 9 – 10 am.

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