A Conference on a Cruise – Does that Really Work?

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This May, I was fortunate to be the recipient of ACLCP grant funds which made my attendance at a library conference possible. I had heard of the Library Collective before but never had the chance to attend their conferences. Colleagues spoke highly of this conference, so when I heard that they were hosting their conference this year on a cruise ship, Independence of the Seas, I felt like they were personally inviting me to come along for the ride. My partner and I have enjoyed several cruises previously, so I already knew that this could be the conference of a lifetime!

I could tell from the conference website that the Library Collective prefers highly interactive sessions over sage on the stage lectures, so I decided to submit a proposal which was later accepted that invited participants to experience firsthand an educational learning technology through the lens of cognitive load theory as the theoretical framework. Participants in my session joined my lesson online which was hosted on the Nearpod platform. During my presentation, I spent a few minutes defining cognitive load and invited participants to identify how extraneous cognitive load impacts students during our one-shots. I described how I use Nearpod in one-shot instruction sessions, and session participants were able to experience a variety of Nearpod activities including polls, quizzes, web links, collaborate boards, open ended questions, and slides. I saw several participants oohing and ahhing while participating in these activities. We identified ways in which Nearpod and tools like it can reduce cognitive load during library instruction.

I also attended some fabulous presentations. I got to experience BaFa BaFa, a cultural awareness training simulation, provide feedback to presenters about an in development conflict resolution tool, learn about how language barriers exacerbate issues around fact-checking for students, listen to stories about positive library impact, generate new programming ideas for wellness, debate whether libraries should prioritize people or resources when thinking about space planning, leverage ChatGPT for outreach, and acquire strategies for saying "no" to out of scope work.

The conference overall was a very unique experience. The cruise itself was a five-day sailing with ports on Days 2 and 4. The conference lasted from 9:00AM to 5:00PM with a break for lunch on days 3 and 5 in the dedicated conference space on Deck 2 of the ship. This schedule allowed folks new to cruising an opportunity to get their sea legs under them while adjusting to the ship and cruise life. Our first port day (Day 2) was CocoCay, an incredibly serene and luscious beach island owned by Royal Caribbean. That evening, there was a welcome reception for conference attendees and their partners. We were able to eat some cake and mingle, getting to know each other before the sessions began in earnest. The first full conference day (Day 3) included a plenary session (BaFa BaFa, described above) followed by breakout sessions. The second port day (Day 4) was spent at Cozumel with attendees going their own way on different excursions. The second conference day (Day 5) included breakout sessions and formally concluded the conference with a Wrap Up session where we learned about managing workload. The day ended with an informal Wrap Up party where attendees got to talk to each other about what we learned one final time before debarking the ship the next day.

This type of conference had both benefits and challenges. Benefits: many people spoke about enjoying the cruise ship and the itinerary, how a cruise naturally builds in time to explore other locations. Getting the full benefits of enjoying another location can be a challenge when attending a land-based conference since you may have to pay extra for local activities and/or include personal time to explore a hosting city on your own. Folks also commented on the convenience of being on a cruise ship – locations and necessities were never far away, the cruise ship was built with physical accessibility in mind, the crew were always eager and happy to help with anything, etc. Attendees also seemed pretty relaxed to me – you could occasionally spot someone sipping a mojito or mai tai in the conference rooms. The cost was actually more economical than most land-based conferences. The base registration rate which included the room, all complimentary dining options, and access to the entire conference was just over $800. When I attend ACRL, ALA, LOEX, or PaLA conferences, the registration rate is usually a few hundred dollars and most often doesn't include food or lodging. The main challenge that I heard attendees comment on included some institutions not agreeing to pay for conference attendance on a cruise ship because of optics, though the Library Collective did provide some talking points in advance we could provide to our institutions regarding environmental impact of cruising.

So, would I be interested in other library conferences on cruise ships? 100% unequivocally YES! I love library conferences, and I love cruising, so it's a match made in heaven for me. I was able to meet some passionate and knowledgeable librarians and gain so many new ideas from attending different sessions.

I'd be happy to answer any questions anyone has either about the conference I attended or cruising in general. I may, or may not, but **definitely do** have a cruise to Italy coming up at the end of June for some personal vacation time. If you want to reach out to me, you can email me at emilyreed@psu.edu. I'd love to chat with you!