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# Innovative library induction – introducing the 'Cephalonian Method'



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## Background

In autumn 2002 Year 1 medical and biological sciences students at Cardiff University were introduced to their respective libraries via a new method of induction which we have dubbed 'the Cephalonian Method'. This novel alternative format replaced a 50 minute traditional presentation for Year 1 medical students, and a tour of the science library for Year 1 biological sciences students. We used the method with groups of up to 300 students in lecture theatres, and with smaller groups of around 30 students in training rooms. The presentation of these sessions was shared by two librarians and is now being rolled out to other courses within the Cardiff School of Biosciences.

This article describes the development and implementation of the Cephalonian Method, and briefly discusses its evaluation and future potential. In the context of the article the term *induction* refers only to the initial contact session and does not cover those induction programmes which include information skills training.

## Why induction?

The function of the initial induction session is twofold. Firstly, it provides students with the basic introductory information they need to start using the library and its services confidently and effectively. Secondly, the session is a perfect

opportunity for library staff to promote the service and present it in the best possible light. This is the first chance we get to make an impression and impact. First impressions count and whether we like it or not, first impressions last. If we get induction *right* (or as *right* as we possibly can) we have opened a doorway to a new world of information. If we get it *wrong*, the consequences can be damaging and long-lasting.

Webster's definition of the term *induction* neatly summarises the aim of the session:

'An initial experience: an exposure that introduces one to something previously mysterious or unknown'<sup>1</sup>

As the definition implies, our key task is to *demystify*. The challenge is to do this in a way which is stimulating, engaging and enjoyable for students and library staff and this has been our focus whilst developing the Cephalonian Method

## A fresh start

In 2002, the librarians working with the Cardiff School of Biosciences reviewed induction practices; we felt that we had lost the sense of adventure and opportunity which should be a part of the induction process. Library induction has long had the reputation of being 'boring' and 'uninspiring', something of an 'ugly duckling'. We all have our horror stories; for many librarians memories of induction over the years are dominated by images of blank faces, glazed-over eyes and stifled yawns! To alleviate this, we thought that the traditional methods needed to be rejuvenated and revitalised. It was time to freshen things up and give induction some sparkle.

We also felt that these traditional methods were not the most effective way to communicate the essential information required during induction. Our aim was for students to retain as much of the basic information as possible and we believed that if they were alert and interested they would assimilate a greater volume of that information. In our view, trailing a large group of bored, passive students around the library no longer offered the best possible introduction to the service.

Most academic librarians have discovered that delivering induction can be one of the least rewarding aspects of the job. One of the problems is the relentless repetition; it becomes difficult to preserve a sense of conviction and spontaneity when delivering the same information for perhaps the tenth time in a single day! Sometimes automatic pilot kicks in and then important informa-

tion can be unconsciously omitted. We wanted to see if it was possible to make induction an inspirational and enjoyable experience for library staff as well.

Another major impetus for change was the development of Cardiff University's information literacy policy in 2001. Implementation of the policy led to the redesign of our information skills teaching, and it seemed logical to start with the induction sessions, to provide a sound basis for the elements of the course.

### What did we want?

Our top priority was to incorporate some form of interaction. We wanted induction to have the illusion of being 'student driven' while at the same time we controlled the overall structure and content. It needed to be lively and pacy, delivered in a way that was striking and memorable and which engaged the students for the whole session. We wanted a format that was different from the norm, that would keep us on our toes and present us in a more dynamic light; the latter to encourage attendance at future information literacy workshops.

We also wanted to use humour. We believe that humour can be a very effective tool for conveying information. We were particularly inspired by Trefts and Blakeslee (2000)<sup>2</sup> who presented a convincing case for humour within information skills teaching. Finally, we wanted induction to have a sense of drama, theatricality and unpredictability and we feel that we achieved this with the Cephalonian Method.

### The inspiration

Our inspiration came from the tourist industry. The initial idea came from science librarian Linda Davies during a visit to Cephalonia. Linda attended a holiday rep's greeting session in one of the colourful local bars. This event had been structured in an unusual way. In place of the usual lecture detailing attractions on the island, holiday-makers were assigned printed questions which they were required to read aloud in a random sequence. For example, 'Am I stuck on the island for a week, or are there trips to the mainland?' or 'Is there a reliable bus service because I'm too scared to drive on these roads?' This simple idea proved to be a very effective ice-breaker, and when Linda returned to Cardiff, we discussed the idea and decided that it could be adapted and developed into a new model for student induction. The 'Cephalonian Method' of induction was born!

### How it works

The Cephalonian Method is a fusion of colour, music and audience participation which is designed to appeal to the senses. The main feature of the method is that students drive the session forward by asking us a series of questions from cards distributed as they arrive. Our first task was to formulate a set of questions which would be the building blocks of the session. We divided these questions into four categories:

- **Basic introductory information**  
E.g. why are there so many libraries in Cardiff University?
- **Finding items on reading lists**  
E.g. how are the books and journals arranged on the shelves?
- **Services and facilities**  
E.g. when I need to borrow how many items can I check-out?
- **Miscellaneous**  
E.g. does the library have a website?  
do I get any more help or is this it?

Each category was assigned a colour. For example, *Basic introductory information* was blue, *Finding items on reading lists* was yellow. Each question within each category was printed on a card of the appropriate colour. The sixteen cards were handed to unsuspecting students before the start of the session. Instructions were provided on the back of each card.

### Instructions

When you hear the colour of your card called by a presenter, please stand and ask the question which you have been assigned. Please speak loudly and clearly so that your fellow students will hear - especially if you are at the rear of the lecture theatre.

Thank you - your assistance is much appreciated!

We began the session by asking 'Could we have a blue question please?' The first student in possession of a blue card who rose to his or her feet had the 'privilege' of asking their assigned question. Each question had a correspondingly coloured PowerPoint slide containing the response and other information relating to the topic. We then located the relevant slide, delivered the information and requested further blue cards until all questions within that section had been covered.

The colour coding was the key to the method's success. This is what gave a session its logical structure and progression. We worked through the colour categories in a pre-determined sequence. After working through the blue questions (*Basic introductory information*) we moved on to the yellow section (*Finding items on reading lists*) which incorporated a demonstration of the Voyager library catalogue. Next we moved onto the red questions (*Services and facilities*) then completed the session with a round of green (*Miscellaneous*) questions. In this way, all related topics were covered within the same part of the session.

Unpredictability arose because within each colour category, we did not know the order in which the questions would be asked. This required flexibility and some dexterity in the use of *PowerPoint*. The secret was to have on hand a key of slide numbers enabling us to speedily locate the relevant slide by keying-in the appropriate number. This gave a seamless, professional transition and usually impressed the audience!

We tried to communicate the information in an interesting and entertaining manner. In particular, we injected humour into the phrasing of many of the questions. For example, a simple factual question relating to our printing facilities was transformed into:

*'My Mum has e-mailed me a photo of Miguel, my pet iguana. Where can I print him out?'*

The accompanying slide featured a striking image of Miguel himself! We decided to give the *PowerPoint* presentation a distinctive visual identity. Each slide featured a humorous piece of copyright free clipart linked to the information content of the slide.

The sessions in the lecture theatre lasted approximately 50 minutes with groups of 150 or 300 medical students. However, sessions for biological sciences students were 90 minutes and included practical training on the Voyager library catalogue. These sessions consisted of groups of 30 students and were held in a PC training room.

#### **Advantages of the method**

We discovered that even when used in a large lecture theatre, this informal format was an excellent ice-breaker, helping us to establish a good rapport with the students. The element of surprise created a real buzz of interest and most students appeared to enjoy the different presentation style of the Cephalonian Method. Used with smaller groups of biological sciences students the method encouraged even more interaction; students were

actively taking part in the session and were much less inhibited about asking additional questions of their own. This was a very positive feature.

For once, we found preparation for induction both satisfying and enjoyable; we had put some fun back into the sessions and we had the opportunity to be imaginative and creative. We particularly enjoyed creating the question scenarios, choosing the colourful images for the slides and even adding sound effects. Versatility and adaptability were the other advantages; preparation time was not excessive and one set of questions were easily modified for other groups and locations. Feedback from librarians at the Joint CoFHE / UC&R Study Conference 2004<sup>3</sup> indicated that the method could also be utilised in the further education sector.

Presenting the sessions certainly provided us with variety; no two sessions were ever the same owing to the varying order of the questions and the differing responses of each group. What surprised us most was that such a simple idea could so dramatically alter the dynamics and atmosphere of a session. Induction was no longer a chore but a stimulating and enjoyable experience.

#### **Potential pitfalls**

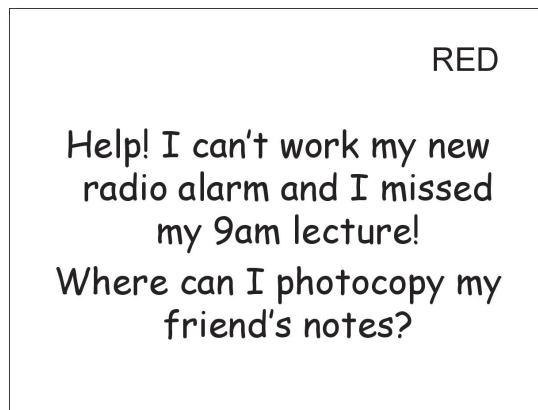
We recognised that the new format did not give students the spatial orientation provided by a library tour. This was potentially problematic for the biological sciences students using the Science Library, a large sprawling site within a listed building. In October 2003 we distributed brief questionnaires at the start of each session and several respondents commented that the inclusion of images or plans of the library would have enhanced their understanding. This is something we are planning to implement for the 2004 induction sessions.

This format is not for the fainthearted; library staff need to be flexible and must be prepared to adlib and think on their feet. We found it to be an exciting but risky method to use. The most common problem was accidentally selecting the wrong slide. We also experienced one session in which several of the questions were not forthcoming because some of the cards had vanished or were being surreptitiously withheld by the students allocated to read them. As a matter of course we had come to expect the unexpected and we overcame this by filling in the gaps ourselves.

Understandably, we could not audition students for their role in the session as time and necessity demanded that question cards were issued

randomly at the start. We recognised that some students would find it daunting to stand up and speak in a large lecture theatre. However, we pointed out that if anyone was unhappy to take part they could pass their card onto a more extrovert class member. Audibility was also a problem with students unused to speaking in a large venue and not raising their voices sufficiently. We overcame this by repeating the questions for emphasis and clarity and featuring them at the top of the corresponding *PowerPoint* slides.

There was a special issue to consider due to the method's reliance on colour coding. We needed to ensure that colour blind students would not be disadvantaged. It was important that these sessions were compliant with the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001*<sup>4</sup> so we printed the colour of each card in the top right-hand corner, enabling any colour blind students to participate.



#### **Music and the Cephalonian Method**

Music is an integral part of the Cephalonian Method and was played when students entered and left the lecture theatre or training room. We also used background music during the hands-on training on the Voyager library catalogue. We use music as we believe that it can have an uplifting effect on the mood and atmosphere of a session.

Research has demonstrated that certain kinds of music help to create a state of 'relaxed alertness' and attentiveness in which the learner is very receptive to new information. This is sometimes referred to as the *Mozart Effect*<sup>5</sup>. The correct choice of track is vital. For a 9am session we opted for calming New Age or inspirational piano music. During afternoon sessions our choice needed to be bold and invigorating, so we chose *Corazón Espinado* by Santana. This linked with the Mexican theme of Miguel the iguana who featured on our title slide. We also played Latin American classical guitar music during the hands-on catalogue training.

We had considered the copyright implications beforehand and were advised by the university's copyright unit that educational establishments are permitted to play sound recordings for the purposes of instruction without infringing copyright. This is provided that the audience consists only of staff and students of the university and that there are no members of the public present.

We were keen to discover what students thought of the use of music and we included questions on this in the survey. It was evident that we could not please everyone. 54% believed that music had enhanced the session whilst 38% did not have an opinion and only 8% felt that the music had been of no benefit. We also asked if they could suggest more appropriate music and we received some intriguing suggestions, most of which we had not heard of and some of which we felt were rather inappropriate!

#### **Feedback and evaluation**

The survey mentioned above asked students for their views, comments and ratings on various aspects of their induction session. We received over 300 responses with 78% indicating that they preferred this method of induction to a traditional library tour.

We asked two key questions. Firstly, '*Do you think this session provided you with an appropriate introduction to the library?*' 97% thought that it did. But could we entice students back for the next information skills session? We asked '*Do you think it will be beneficial to attend the next information skills session?*' Nearly 80% answered in the affirmative.

At the end of the questionnaire we asked how they rated the session overall. 86% rated the session between 7-10 on a scale of 1-10. We felt that this gave us the endorsement we needed to continue using and developing the method. Almost all the comments were extremely positive, for example '*Really good idea, made it more fun to watch the presentation*', '*very well presented, I loved it!*' and '*more about Miguel please...I feel I know that iguana!*'. One respondent remarked that '*it was bit weird*', but we interpreted this as a compliment!

#### **The future**

The Cephalonian Method has been a worthwhile experiment and we think that the idea has potential. Future enhancements might include the addition of more audiovisual material such as moving images, photographs and a virtual tour of the library. We are currently working on a version incorporating comic strip inspired slides featuring

shots of a fictitious student with speech bubbles and captions. However, we do not want the visual elements to distract from the information content.

Perhaps the ultimate enhancement would be the incorporation of a quiz using the potential of audience response technology with wireless interactive keypads. This would take student interaction and engagement to a new level and would be a useful tool for identifying the extent to which the students had absorbed the information. This technology may be more widely available in the future and offers an exciting prospect for library induction and instruction.

We have demonstrated the Cephalonian Method at various events and the reaction from fellow professionals has been extremely positive. Many have expressed the wish to experiment with the approach and to adapt it to their own needs and local circumstances. Librarians who are unable to abandon the library tour have pointed out that the Cephalonian Method's question and answer approach could easily be incorporated into a traditional tour. The greatest reservation we have encountered from professionals at other institutions concerns the potential reluctance of some colleagues to try a totally new and adventurous approach. However for us, the big attraction was finding a fresh and innovative approach that worked and was worth a little extra effort and stress.

So that, in a nutshell, is the Cephalonian Method. We believe we have succeeded in transforming an ugly duckling into a swan. A traditional induction session has become a dynamic, interactive and enjoyable learning experience for students and library staff alike. The beauty of the method is its simplicity and versatility, relying on the effectiveness of traditional communication skills, some creative flair and a bit of theatrical artifice. We have certainly succeeded in bringing some rays of Ionian sunshine to Cardiff University!

## References

- 1 P.B. Gove (editor), *Webster's third new international dictionary of the English language*, Springfield: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1986, p 1154
- 2 K. Trefts and S. Blakeslee, 'Did you hear the one about the Boolean operators? Incorporating comedy into library instruction', *Reference services review*, 28 (4), 2000, pp 369-77
- 3 The conference website includes the presentation with examples of slides used during induction.  
<http://www.cilip.org.uk/groups/cofhe/conference2004.html>
- 4 Available at: <http://www.hms.o.gov.uk/acts/acts2001/20010010.htm>
- 5 D. Campbell, *The Mozart effect: tapping the power of music to heal the body, strengthen the mind, and unlock the creative spirit*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002