Lor’s Malaguzzi (1920-1994), an Italian educator who specialized in early childhood education, once said that “Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead, they should embark together on a journey down the water” (Malaguzzi). Malaguzzi’s quote touches upon an instructional concept I placed at the center of the design and implementation my teaching demonstration: active learning. Effective preparation allowed me to successfully incorporate components of active learning into my demonstration. Despite my thorough preparation, I recognize that my delivery style requires improvement.

As I prepared for my demonstration, I decided I did not want to present my demonstration of Acronym Finder in a passive format—the format in which, as Malaguzzi points out, learning and teaching “stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by” (Malaguzzi). I recalled the numerous classes, from junior high through graduate school, in which I have sat quietly, jotted notes, and listened to the teacher lecture, sometimes without pausing, from thirty minutes to three hours. As Cheryl LaGuardia and Christine K. Oka suggest in their second basic tenet of library instruction (55), I strove to put myself into the learner’s place. I asked myself what would be the most useful feature of Acronym Finder I would like to learn about if I were a participant in the demonstration. I sought to identify a single feature that did not require an overly detailed explanation since I recognized the importance of avoiding the passive instruction format and the need to dedicate a portion of my presentation for the participants to explore the search feature on their own. My choice of a sufficiently narrow focus may be considered a strength of my presentation. Dawn also noted this in a plus comment: “She focused her presentation on a small enough topic that she could really cover it” (Dawn). After deciding to
demonstrate Acronym Finder’s word in meaning search, I wrote a step-by-step outline as part of my preparation, and I also conducted several practice searches in the database. Following LaGuardia and Oka’s suggestion that the outline must first be cut in half, and then cut by one-third (60), I continually revised the outline as I practiced my demonstration, keeping in mind the seven plus or minus two rule regarding the number of key points that should be discussed during an instruction session (Wong, online lecture). Editing the outline was very difficult. As LaGuardia and Oka point out (59), the continual revisions did seem like a form of self-inflicted “amputation” since I wanted to share many more of Acronym Finder’s useful features than time allowed. However, I recognized the revisions as a necessity in order to avoid overwhelming the participants with too much information in a short amount of time. I also sought to reduce the amount time I spent on the guided search example in order to increase the amount of time for the participants to explore the database on their own and share their findings with the class. Based on the comments I received from participants regarding both my familiarity with the resource (Janet, EmilyZ, and Dawn) and my unrushed pace of teaching (Wendy and MelissaW), I consider adequate preparation as one strength of my presentation.

The thoroughness of my preparation and my comfort with Acronym Finder enabled me to successfully incorporate active learning techniques into the demonstration. As I wrote the demonstration outline, I intentionally targeted two sensory preferences we have discussed in class (Wong, on-campus lecture). First, I strove to appeal to those with a visual learning preference by creating a concise hand-out, and also by occasionally typing phrases into the text chat that corresponded with the oral component of my demonstration. Second, I targeted kinesthetic learners by inviting the participants to follow along as I performed a search, and also by giving the participants the opportunity to do a search of their own and share their findings
with the class. Several participants’ comments suggest I successfully incorporated active learning components for those with visual and kinesthetic sensory preferences. Janet, for example, noted that she appreciated the learning-by-doing component of my demonstration: “I really liked that you gave us time to look for things on our own. It was also well paced” (Janet). The hand-out I prepared was also well-received. In addition to providing specific tips to guide one’s use of Acronym Finder during the actual demonstration, the hand-out also served as a “subversive hand-out” to encourage the participants to explore additional features of Acronym Finder that were not discussed during the demonstration (Jastram). MelissaW noted this positive feature of my hand-out: “[I] liked the ‘extra features’ portion of the handout that linked to some interesting areas of the source that weren’t covered in the presentation” (MelissaW). The last section of my hand-out was effective in that it left the participants “wanting more, not less” as a result of my demonstration, which is LaGuardia and Oka’s fifth basic tenet of effective library instruction (57).

While the participants’ positive comments suggest that my presentation successfully appealed to those learners with visual and kinesthetic sensory preferences, I acknowledge that a crucial component of my delivery style—my tone of voice—merits improvement. After listening to the audio archive of my demonstration, I realize my preparation focused too heavily on making sure I was familiar with the content I included on the outline. As a result, I did not adequately consider the verbal component of my demonstration. Practicing my demonstration before a trial participant would have been more useful than simply practicing it aloud to myself. My nervousness about simultaneously navigating Acronym Finder, monitoring the text chat, and speaking on the telephone, as well as my apprehensiveness about being unable to see the participants’ facial expressions and body language, contributed to my timidity. Several
classmates noted this as a weakness of my presentation in their delta comments. As EmilyZ and MelissaB-T point out, the tone of my voice did not reflect my confidence with the content I was presenting, even though I was familiar with the resource (EmilyZ and MelissaB-T). LaGuardia and Oka also mention self-confidence as an important characteristic of an effective instructor (55). I do wonder if my voice would have sounded differently if I had presented this demonstration in person rather than over the telephone. I realize that improvement in my tone of voice is significant for future speaking opportunities—either in person or via telecommunications technology. My delivery style reflects not only my own sense of professionalism, but also the image of the institution for which I teach. As LaGuardia and Oka point out, “90 percent of library instruction is public relations” (55). A self-confident, but not overly confident, librarian is crucial for the effective delivery of instruction.

Although the teaching demonstration was one of the most difficult assignments I have completed during my graduate coursework, I am glad I had the opportunity to apply the active learning components and sensory preferences we discussed in class. In addition to the practical application, I am grateful for the opportunity to have received constructive feedback from my peers. Designing and implementing this demonstration allowed me not only to familiarize myself with a potentially useful reference resource, but it also helped me to recognize my strengths and weaknesses as a presenter. While I consider my conscientious preparation and my targeting of two sensory preferences as strengths of my demonstration, I agree with my peers that the tone of my teaching voice requires improvement. Malaguzzi makes an excellent point that learning and teaching must go hand-in-hand, not only for those on the receiving end of the instruction, but also for the individual on the giving end. As Malaguzzi suggests, the boundary between teaching and learning should not be black versus white. I would add to Malaguzzi’s quote the most
important lesson I gained from my experience with this demonstration: learning and teaching should con-"confidently" embark together on a journey down the water” (Malaguzzi).
Works Cited


