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Introduction

I started attending Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) events in 2008 when I received a Title III faculty mini-grant to do research in the use of new and evolving technologies in teaching and learning. I attended the first event because it was mandatory for grant recipients. These events were very informative and stimulating because guest speakers and audiences talked about the various teaching methods that they incorporated into their practices. And since then I continued to attend CETL events whenever possible. In most colleges and universities, librarians conduct Information Literacy classes and help students at the reference desk. I consider these two services to be 'teaching'. Thus, it is important for librarians to be involved in research and discussions about existing, new, and evolving pedagogies. In this article I describe my teaching method and how CETL events are relevant to what I do as an academic librarian.

Evolution of Librarianship

In the United States, librarians became involved in teaching as early as in late 19th century. Melvil Dewey, the founder of the modern American Library Association said, "The time is when a library is a school, and the librarian is in the highest sense a teacher" (Dewey, 1876, p. 5). In the beginning, librarians provided library instruction that focused on locating materials in the card catalog and orienting users to the library. Over time, with the demise of card catalogs and the increased use of online catalogs, library instruction has evolved and expanded beyond teaching students how to locate information. Further, the ubiquity of information on the World Wide Web has required librarians to teach students how to evaluate information. The nature of information on the Internet is dynamic, and the format in which information is presented changes frequently. As a result, there are no set rules for students to learn in order to evaluate information. Instead, students need to learn how to critically evaluate information they retrieve from the Web, as well as from books, encyclopedia, newspapers, journals, videos, and various other sources. They need to understand the dynamic nature of online information and learn how to evaluate and synthesize the information they retrieve in order to articulate their thoughts in writing. Thus, the primary role of librarians has broadened from locating and delivering information to students to helping them think critically of any piece of information they retrieve from any source.

My Instructional Method

While teaching a class, the motive of teaching should go beyond the delivery of subject specific information. The aim is to 'stir-up' students' minds and to cultivate the essence of thinking critically in addition to helping students learn factual information. When I took an undergraduate level Human-Computer Interaction course, my professor claimed that his purpose for teaching the class was to stir-up the thoughts in our minds in the hope that we would be aware of all of our past experiences and knowledge and use them as we learned information related to the Human-Computer Interaction course. My primary goal while teaching students at the reference desk and in the information literacy classroom is to encourage students to think critically as they locate, read, and use information to write their research papers, complete assignments or expand their knowledge.

My instructional method is influenced by a student-centered learning model of which there are two strains: Situated Learning Theory and Critical Learning Theory. In the situated learning model, learning is influenced by the activity, context, and culture in which it occurs. When teachers use situated learning pedagogies, they do not pass a body of knowledge to students. Instead, students and teachers work together to construct knowledge based on their experience (situation). Thus, showing students how to order books through CUNY Libraries Inter-Campus Services (CLICS) in an Information Literacy class is much less effective than providing students the opportunity to actually borrow books from other CUNY libraries. Situated learning emphasizes that teachers needs to present information to students in an authentic context.

Critical Learning Theory is an extension of Situated Learning Theory wherein, "Past and present knowledge is deconstructed to find fallacies in thinking and reconstructed to meet the immediate needs of the students" (Cook, 2008, p. 5). For example, when a student comes to the reference desk and asks for information on "Anger, revenge, and injustice," I ask the student a series of questions such as, "How did you come up with the topic?", "Why did you put the three words, anger, revenge, and injustice together?", "Do you have a research question or a thesis statement on your topic?" and "Do you know how to begin your research and what do you think the research process will entail?" I also ask questions such as "Are there any specific resources your professor has asked you to use?", "Have you ever used the databases listed on the library website to find journal articles?", and "Do you know what a peer-reviewed article is?" All these are very important questions; however, the latter set of questions ask for factual information while the former set of questions requires students to think critically and re-evaluate the topic he/she

has formulated based on his/her existing knowledge and experience. Over time, technologies will evolve, and the way databases and information are presented on the Web in books and in journals will change. Therefore, it is an important but short-term necessity for students to learn how to locate information. In the long run, beyond the years spent in college, students are not going to remember the databases they used or even the topics of their term papers; instead, students are going to remember how to do research on any topic of interest.

Quite frequently, students come to the reference desk with journal articles relevant to their research topic but are unable to use them to write their research papers. This is because often students do not know how to synthesize information from the articles they retrieve from the databases. Advancements in cataloging and indexing have allowed students to easily locate relevant articles, books, and other sources; however, students still need to learn how to summarize and synthesize the information they find from these sources. They need to learn how to deconstruct, evaluate, and reconstruct their existing knowledge by integrating information gathered from various articles. When I encounter a student with such a dilemma, I usually ask them questions similar to the ones I presented above and then I ask them, "What's the one thing that you remember from this article, the one point that caught your attention?" And when they answer my question, I ask them, "Do you think you can use that in your paper?" and "How would you do so?" Sometimes I do help them by giving my opinion on how it can be used. But more often than not, within few minutes they tell me how they think the information can be used. And this is how students learn to think critically, sharpen their critical thinking skills, and begin the process of lifelong learning.

Final Thoughts

The field of librarianship is diverse and pedagogy might not matter to all librarians. For instance, law librarians working in law firms might find pedagogy irrelevant to what they do regularly. However, keeping abreast of existing and knowledge of pedagogy is important to academic librarians who help students with their assignments.

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