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Session: Instruction Fails

Critlib Unconference 2015 Session 3 Attendees

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Session 3: 12:45-1:45

Teaching and yoga analogy: when you do yoga, there's at least one part of your body that lights up with pain. That (just as much as perfecting the pose) is the idea to pursue in that sessions. That's something I learned on my path to constructivist teaching - go into the question.

We grow up with an authoritarian model of education; when we stand in front of students as authority what do we do as critical librarians/teachers? How to encourage students to challenge you/info/discussion when they view you as authority? Encouraging dissent when dissent is not incentivized by grading structure? (work with questions rather than responses)

Questioning library neutrality: we all view info through a lens, so acknowledging your own bias at the get-go can remove barriers to understanding. "I like messy conversations."

No matter what your thesis is, you have to know that enemy to speak to it. James LaRue's reading with the enemy.

But what enemy is there? "Problem" students are an opportunity for inclusion.

Question posed to room: have you ever had any student engagement fails, and how did you bounce back from those?

-Sometimes the crickets chirping in the classroom will motivate conversation. Silence is an important pedagogical tool. We process in silence.

-Fear and self-doubt are better than going on cruise control with lecturing. Just like icebreakers are makeus uncomfortable, it's a productive discomfort.

-If you're not comfortable with inquiry-based framework where you're center of authority, trying a problem-based approach can get students focused on a tangible product. For students who aren't comfortable putting themselves out there, a task offers the opportunity to participate on their own terms. [writing ?s and throwing them into bin at center of room, then drawing randomly and reading aloud. provides anonymity and participation in a face to face environment]

-And on a related note, we live in a hyperstimulated society, and a few minutes of boredom is a relief which creates space for creative processing. Librarians might be wrong in considering ourselves one-shots; we are one step in the whole research process.

-My institution frowns upon scavenger hunts...but I did one anyway. To make it meaningful, I made the students use the catalog to search for very specific data points and connect the dots. I found the benefits of having them work in teams and incentivizing with competition. They engaged.

-Students LIVE within information and they responded to being met on that level. I asked them how many types of info they used that day, which set the stage for the rest of the day. We all have something to offer because we're all using the same exact things.

-If you start with theory, they'll blank out; whereas if you start with something tangible and immediate to their lives (What did you do today?), they will use it as a springboard to jump into more complex stuff. Order of operations matters.

-Acknowledge the freshmen's existing search skills and expertise, then explain how we're going to take it a step farther. Scaffolding and validation!

A fail: I followed the thread of a really lively and engaged classroom conversation, and avoided demonstrating any interfaces in favor of that thread. At the end of the session, a student walked up to me and said, "Yeah, so how do I use the library?"...Are we failing students if we don't care if they get an A or B, when we instead try to get them thinking critically?...Sometimes I have a great session with students where I've totally failed the instructor's goals...Professors see librarians as being there to teach students how to use a database, therefore I consider it a 'pre-fail' if the professor insists on being present at the instruction session. It's like they feel I'm treading on their territory...When I was new I was more compliant with professor's requests, but now that I'm 3 years into it I have more ownership of my purpose in my librarian role. I don't enjoy butting heads with faculty, but it has happened...I try to turn those 'being challenged by professor in front of students' moments by highlighting how different people might undertake research - capitalizing on differences of opinion as a teachable moment....

How important is it to get the professor's buy-in for library instruction? AKA how big is your institution? At a small school, it is absolutely imperative that faculty buys into your instruction.

As a new librarian, the school I've entered has a broken relationship between faculty and library. Legacy feuds that obstruct institutional goals.

-As a counterpoint to this, the professors at my school love the library so much they give us too much freedom and not enough context (i.e. even a syllabus).

I'm thinking of critlib fails as being even more perilous than standard instruction librarians fails. What WE meet with is silence, pushback, or hostility. My own has to do with a credit-bearing info lit course where I have all the power as professor. So fails in that environment are all on me. The conclusion in one class was that because of media consolidation, we are getting all our information from a handful of companies. Is there anything wrong with that? [crrriickets chirping] "No!"

-What about when you present what you think is compelling information and there's no response. Is that a fail?

If charts & graphs don't work, what about personal stories to penetrate students being unresponsive?

Or what if students are given roles to inhabit and can reason through their options/power in those situations?

Got any crit lib failure stories? The danger isn't the known stories; it's the ones we don't know about. How are we as educators excluding any students?

-I thought I was perceived as approachable, until one day no one would respond to my question. When I asked why, one replied, "What would we answer when you're just going to tell us we're wrong?"

We're understaffed and our collections are being depleted; with less than ever, how do we get knowledge of alternative presses?

Using subject headings to discuss historical power structures behind information. [Ex: To a group of high schoolers whose teacher was insistent I focus on LC subject headings. What can you tell me about two hypothetical cultures and their values based on their subject headings - one Dewey, one LC]