Step-by-Step Teaching, Part Two: Tasks and Activities

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This article is part 2 of 3 in a series from George Washington University on teaching workshops.

Who teaches instruction sessions at your library? How do they teach? Do they follow a particular model? This is the second article in a series of three, demonstrating how the Gelman Library at George Washington University worked towards Step-by-Step Teaching.

At Gelman, the librarians of Education and Instruction Group (EIG), a subset of the Reference and Instruction Department, teach the majority of instruction sessions while other librarians occasionally teach specific discipline related classes in fields such as Business, Science, and Engineering.

To share experience and knowledge about the process of teaching, EIG librarians have conducted a series of three teaching workshops for the rest of the Reference and Instruction Department, including library assistants who teach. EIG librarians planned the sessions to last at least 90 minutes, with an emphasis on incorporating some form of hands-on practice.

The workshop series was based on the five questions for instructional design as presented at the 1999 and 2002 Institute for Information Literacy Immersion Program, which our Instruction Coordinator had attended. The questions are:

What do you want the student to be able to do? (Outcome)

What does the student need to know in order to do this well? (Curriculum)

What activity will facilitate the learning? (Pedagogy)

How will the student demonstrate the learning? (Assessment)

How will I know the student has done this well? (Criteria)

The goals of the workshop series were:

- By the end of the workshop series, librarians will have a better understanding of the instructional design process and how it is used to assist with creating instruction sessions.

By the end of the workshop series librarians will have the tools to incorporate at least one new idea into their interactions with patrons in order to assist then with the learning process.

The second workshop, which we are describing here, was held in September 2004, two months after the first one. We covered questions two and three, curriculum and pedagogy, and we build it directly upon the first workshop about learning outcomes. One of the first decisions we made was to simplify these terms even farther into tasks and activities. Our goals for this workshop were:

- By the end of this session, librarians will be able to break down what the students need to know into tasks.

By the end of this session, librarians will be able to select activities to facilitate the learning of the tasks they set out for the students.

The attendees sat in groups at four tables that were equipped with markers and a flip chart. Each group was given a scenario handout. The scenarios detailed the topic of the class, length of the library session, and related research assignment. Drawing on feedback received after the first workshop, we used sce-

narios that were not solely targeted to fresh-men. To guide the whole process we used a PowerPoint presentation.

We started by recapping learning outcomes from the first workshop. We asked partici-pants to keep in mind that good learning out-comes include action-oriented language, meas-urable results, and transferable skills; good learning outcomes are clear to the student; use the phrase "in order to" and Bloom's taxon-omy. We had each group work on this for five minutes and asked them to identify just one learning outcome.

The next step was the introduction of the con-cept of: "What does the student need to know on the basis of the learning outcome?" This means we needed to break each learning out-come into tasks. We used the analogy of mak-ing a peanut butter sandwich, identifying the tasks necessary to achieve the goal of making a peanut butter sandwich:

• First you need to identify what a peanut butter sandwich is and what ingredients go into it

• Locate the ingredients, by room and con-tainer in the room

• Understand how the containers are organ-ized

• Get or access the ingredients and tools

• Assemble your sandwich

• Evaluate its taste, quality, and individual ingredients

Store your experience for future use.

To stimulate the groups to apply a similar task analysis to their learning outcome, we then discussed these four questions:

1. In teaching undergrads, what can you as-sume they know?

2. Do you teach to the lowest or highest com-mon denominator?

3. How much can they realistically retain?

How do you effectively meet your goals? Do you do it all in class? Assume they know some? Or provide other resources to find the answers?

Next we asked the groups to brainstorm all the different tasks they could think of to accom-plish their learning outcome. Instead of making a list, we distributed paper and asked them to put each task on its own piece of paper. Then as a group, they decided on which of the five tasks would be best to achieve their learning outcome. The group's secretary then recorded these five tasks on the group's flipchart. To help them get started we verbally gave them these examples: reference books, handout, and keyword search.

Once they had their tasks, we asked them to move on to the next step: What activity will fa-cilitate learning? We allotted twenty minutes to this part of the workshop. To jump start this process, we handed each table a packet of ac-tivities written on construction paper. The ac-tivities included were: lecture, small groups, hands on computer (students), handout, librar-ian demo, pre-planned examples, peer demo, examples from students, and ask questions.

We asked each person in the group to take a few minutes to think about which activity each of them would personally choose for the specific tasks. If someone thought of an activity for which there was no card, they could make a new card. Once everyone had chosen their ac-tivities, the group reconvened and compared their choices. We specifically asked members of EIG to go last, so that others would not defer to their expertise. At this point we asked each group to report back to the entire workshop about their discussion on different activities.

Step-by-step Teaching

partnerships with faculty—all faculty—translates into stepping out beyond the library. We will serve on the teaching, learning, and assessment teams at our institutions. Our roles will blur to serve positions inside and outside the library. We will support teaching in the classroom with online tutorials and other 24/7 "just in time" instruction tools. We will be innovators on campus—using the course delivery software such as Blackboard to not only teach but to assess student learning. The train the teacher model is highly effective, but only when librarians become the "go-to" people on campus. We need to be the leaders and cut the edge in teaching and learning. In this environment, information literacy will be an institutional goal like writing, critical thinking, communication, and civic engagement. All students will have to demonstrate competency, and what librarian strive to achieve in information fluency and lifelong learning for students will be a mutual goal for all.

As a way to tie this all together, we posted a PowerPoint slide that asked for personal reflection. We asked them to think about which teaching methods did they choose most? Were they active learning, cooperative learning, discovery, lecture, problem-based, reflective, or student centered? And then in light of that, which teaching methods did they best respond to? To help with that, we asked them to recall the best teacher they had or the best learning experience they had. We wanted people to think about individual learning styles and individual teaching styles.

The workshop was a definite success. The attendees came away with many ideas of how to modify their personal teaching styles to incorporate different tasks and activities to achieve their learning outcomes.

—Look for part 3 of this series articles from George Washington University in volume 32(4).

every means I have to shake up the flock. That's why I took this gig.

If I may cite from the Good Book, (ACRL's Information Literacy Competency Standards) (Standard 5: Verse 3)

> *The information literate student determines whether the new knowledge has an impact on the individual's value system and takes steps to reconcile the difference.*

The next morning, hoping to start the day with a sunnier attitude, I opened my email messages. Some were offering to lower my mortgage, others to raise my you-know-what! Scattered among them were a half dozen questions

from students. Mostly, they read like this:

"im very sorry to bother you but i would like to see if can help me find some information about immigration, why are they immigrating and since when. I would appriciate your help."

One by one I responded gracefully to them all. Just before I left my office for another rounds of classes, another email arrived.

"Hi… I was in that class yesterday. I'm the guy doing Wackenhut. I saw this article that said that they got this huge contract to guard nuclear power plants, but this other thing i read said that the goverment says that they don't do a good job. So what's up with that? That would be a "threat" right?"

"You bet," I replied. :)