Accommodating Faculty Requests and Staying True to Your Pedagogical Ideals in the One-Shot Information Literacy Session

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Abstract

Librarians are frequently asked to teach several databases in a one-shot session, despite findings suggesting that such database demonstrations do not lead to optimal student outcomes. The *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* highlights the concepts of metaliteracy and metacognition. This paper investigates ways in which the author leveraged both of these concepts to reconcile her pedagogical ideals with an attempt to honor a faculty member's request. By demonstrating question-posing and making her own metacognitive processes transparent to students, the author found that she could honor a faculty request for specific database demonstration while helping learners comprehend and see beyond the constructs of platform and format.

Keywords: information literacy; library instruction; academic libraries; question posing; metacognition; metaliteracy

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Accommodating Faculty Requests and Staying True to Your Pedagogical Ideals in the One-Shot Information Literacy Session

From the diverse vantage points of public services, technical services, and systems librarian, I have witnessed a wide and evolving range of student research expectations over the past decade. The relative ease of keyword searching and expanded access afforded by search engines and discovery platforms have created an environment in which users expect to be able to find, understand and make use of information without a librarian's assistance. However, as information professionals understand, these processes are always mediated. Librarians remain well-suited to teach and add value to information search and retrieval processes in the digital age, but most student research and use of library resources occurs outside of the library classroom. When librarians do have the opportunity to engage students in an instruction setting, we must come to terms with various pedagogical, resource, and logistical constraints.

One such challenge recently presented itself to me when a faculty member scheduled a demonstration of multiple databases in a 50-minute instruction session for a graduate-level music bibliography course. Besides the obvious time constraint, I also struggled with the request to demonstrate specific databases when my instruction typically focuses on process and source evaluation. Additionally, my background in music and interest in music bibliography confirmed that many specialized music reference tools and indices are not necessarily intuitive and may require explanation and instruction (Scott, 2016). Initially, I was uncertain how I would balance all of these seemingly competing demands. In the end, I found that by modeling question-posing and encouraging reflection, I could honor a faculty request for specific platform instruction while integrating process instruction to enhance learner engagement and ensure transferability. This paper investigates the ways in which I reconciled my pedagogical ideals with an attempt to honor a faculty member's request.

Literature Review

Librarian instructors have long endeavored to foster engagement and ensure the transferability of concepts and skills taught during their sessions. Appropriating

pedagogical models from educators, such as problem-based learning and critical literacy, provides librarians with methods by which to engage and empower learners to take responsibility for their learning. According to two of its authors, the recently filed *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education [Framework]* "affords a broader, integrated set of 'big ideas' about research, scholarship, and information" (Jacobson & Gibson, 2015, p. 104). This theoretical grounding helps practitioners better understand learners' knowledge practices and dispositions along the expert-to-novice spectrum.

Metaliteracy, which is highlighted in the *Framework* document, has been defined within the library science literature as "an overarching and self-referential framework that integrates emerging technologies and unifies multiple literacy types…[It] expands the scope of generally understood information competencies and places a particular emphasis on producing and sharing information in participatory digital environments" (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011, p. 62). Metaliteracy provides a useful perspective from which to evaluate digital research in that it is format agnostic and emphasizes creative or productive response and not merely content consumption (Mackey & Jacobson, 2014). The dynamic and interactive nature of digital platforms requires that information users approach knowledge construction and learning with flexibility and awareness. This is one reason that Seeber suggests information literacy instruction in a digital age should not be strictly format- or resource-specific (2015).

Also integral to the *Framework* is metacognition. Studies from various disciplines have documented how through metacognition, or cognitive self-appraisal, students "can enhance their learning by becoming aware of their own thinking as they read, write, and solve problems" (Paris & Winograd, 1990, p. 15). Houtman recently identified several strategies for incorporating self-regulated learning into information literacy sessions, including opening with a "think-pair-share exercise"; using "What? - So what? - Now what?" prompts; and avoiding yes/no responses to instead facilitate discussion (Houtman, 2015). Using such techniques in a library instruction setting promotes collaborative, active, and self-regulated learning and encourages students to take accountability for their understanding. Self-regulated learning is more inclusive than metacognition, including "awareness and control over one's emotions, motivations, behavior, and environment as related to learning," but both emphasize prioritizing the learner's understanding (Nilson, 2013, p. 5).

Question-posing as a pedagogical approach can mediate student disinterest or anxiety and help instructors gauge student understanding (Davis, 2009). Education advocates Rothstein and Santana have found that teaching question-posing by modeling how to formulate and articulate questions is a uniquely empowering practice (2011). The ability to ask one's own questions is also a demonstrated need in college-aged students; the most recent Project Information Literacy publication found "a failure of higher education to prepare lifelong learners who leave college experienced at framing and asking their own questions…" (Head, 2016). The implications of this failure are considerable; the inability to frame and ask questions leaves otherwise motivated learners powerless to overcome impediments to their understanding.

Empowering students to participate by asking questions facilitates student engagement and legitimizes their contributions (Shor, 1992). Asking questions of students also provides insight into their extant knowledge and allows the librarian to better scaffold instruction: "Learning something about your students' current skills will offer opportunities for improving the skills they do possess and ensure they explore the tools required for their discipline" (Oates, 2013, p. 288). For all of these reasons, I integrated question-posing and opportunities for reflection throughout this platform-heavy music research methods library instruction session.

Course Context

This instruction was devised for a graduate-level music bibliography course that is required for all students in masters, doctoral, and artist certificate music programs at the University of Memphis, a metropolitan research institution. As of Spring 2016, the School of Music had 119 enrolled students in a graduate program. The course is taught by musicology faculty, and traditionally two library sessions are scheduled per semester. The first is a library tour and discussion of some of the Music Library's various print and media collections. The second is described as a "database workshop." Accordingly, the instructor's goal for the session was that students gain familiarity with various databases, including Oxford Music Online, JSTOR, International Index to Music Periodicals (IIMP), Retrospective Index to Music Periodicals (RIPM), Répertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM), and Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale (RILM) via EBSCO.

The Music Librarian typically offers both sessions, but asked me if (considering my educational background, interest in instruction, and relationship with the professor) I would be willing to fill in for her. I was glad for the opportunity. In addition to "showing and telling" multiple database platforms, I hoped to promote reflection on the variety of information types available to address students' diverse information needs. *Grove Music* encyclopedias, for example, are the most important English-language reference source for Western music. However, they coexist among a variety of other authored and edited music reference sources in the Oxford Music Online platform. Students often struggle to understand how a reference book or even an eBook can be "online." Metaliteracy reinforces the need for flexibility and awareness as students encounter traditional information sources in different or unexpected formats.

It is important that students search and acknowledge the variety of reference content available in Oxford Music Online, not only to appreciate the diversity of these sources, but to begin to understand how drastically reference sources differ from the historic periodical literature indexed in RIPM and from the descriptions of extant manuscripts found in RISM. Not without seeing these documents will they appreciate the range of information available, and not without being prompted to ask questions will they reflect on the variety and appropriateness of information sources for their particular project. Cognitive awareness and self-appraisal are essential to the successful understanding and appropriation of information sources.

Methods

The database workshop was held in the main library's computer classroom so that students would be able to search the resources and discover materials for themselves. My goal was to create an active and participatory environment that would not only expose students to the requested resources, but encourage them to use those sources critically and with an understanding of what they comprised. The literature confirms that active learning approaches are more effective and lead to enhanced outcomes (Allen, 1995; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Dabbour, 1997). I opened the session by welcoming the students and encouraging their questions and participation. Because the section included over 25 students, however, the amount of dialogue during the session was limited.

The University of Memphis subscribes to Encore Duet (an EBSCO / Innovative discovery platform) that delivers much, but not all, of the previously-discussed reference and database content to a single page of search results. After briefly covering a few relevant library services (reference services, remote access, Interlibrary Loan, LibGuides), I commenced the database demonstration with a search of the recently-implemented discovery layer. To establish her role as a collaborator, the professor stood with me near the head of the classroom during the session. I searched for her name to begin a discussion of the types of results that were yielded by this platform. I asked students several questions about the results and explained that when they are searching on their own, they should similarly ask questions of the results. Questions ranged from theoretical to applied, easily-answered to more complex. For example, I posed the following questions:

- How are these results different than those yielded in a Google search?
- What resources are we searching?
- Both the professor's first and last name are common; how can we identify *her* work?
- This result is from Grove Music Online but has a book icon. Why? Let's investigate this entry…

Throughout the instruction session, I posed questions and waited for students to answer. By modeling question-posing as a means to investigate the results, I demonstrated to the students that it was their job to ask questions of the content and function of the platforms and not to assume that all content or platforms were equally useful or valid. By posing questions, I also hoped to make explicit some of the metacognitive processes that I go through when conducting research. I was delighted when students requested that I open up the documents so that they could scan them. This led to a fruitful discussion of the necessity of "reading with understanding" the sources one cites, as well as taking accountability for the quality of one's research.

Using the discovery layer as a springboard from which to interact with the specific databases of interest was strategic. Doing so taught students that the same content may be differently accessed, described, or formatted--one of the concepts of metaliteracy. Additionally, working from discovery layer results felt more organic and integrated. Instead of organizing the session into several discrete database demonstrations, I was able to organize the demonstration around research questions and corresponding searches. This approach

allowed the results to convey that some databases truly are more appropriate for certain informational needs.

I created a worksheet (Appendix) that required students to make use of the platforms we discussed in the first portion of the session, and to reflect on and evaluate the results that they found. In order to make the worksheet exercise relevant, I asked students to find information pertinent to their individual semester-long research topics. The classroom instructor collected the worksheet in the subsequent class meeting for a participation grade. The completed worksheet served as the only means of formal assessment of the instruction session.

I measured the success of this instruction session primarily on the basis of the questions students asked during and after the session. Questions revealed that these graduate students had a wide range of comfort and competencies with digital platforms and research processes. Some students were well-acquainted with graduate-level research platforms, processes, and topics, while others were seemingly brand-new to conducting research in a digital environment. Questions ranged from "Do I type my search here?" to "I found a potentially useful article on the [Grove Music Online entry] author's CV. Could I request that through Interlibrary Loan?" Unlike a lecture, which might overwhelm a complete beginner and bore a more experienced student, an interactive, the question-driven format better accommodated students at different skill levels.

It was fortuitous that the computer classroom was available after the session, because several students wanted to continue to work and ask questions. I was delighted that students were initially challenged by some of the worksheet questions, which suggested that this process of reflecting on and evaluating sources was new to them.

Conclusion

Very often librarians work with considerable constraints on their pedagogical ideals. Attempting to teach several disparate platforms comprising different kinds of data made me reconsider how best to imbue such database demonstrations with transferable skills. By demonstrating question-posing and making explicit the processes in which I engage to evaluate the appropriateness of sources, I hoped to provide students with useful strategies to put to work outside of our session. I was initially concerned about covering so much content in a single session. However, I found that by encouraging students to ask questions

and discover resources for themselves, I saved myself the time and energy of explaining information that is often platform-specific and, accordingly, not transferrable.

Metaliteracy and metacognition may feel like they are out of reach in a one-shot session. However, I believe that taking the small steps described above to leverage both skills can enrich our pedagogy. By demonstrating question-posing and making our own metacognitive processes more transparent to students, librarians can help learners comprehend and see beyond the constructs of platform and format.

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Appendix

Music Bibliography: Using Library Databases

1a. Find an entry on a composer/topic related to your project in Grove Music Online. Write or copy/paste the citation below:

_____

_____

1b. Who is the author? List the author's affiliation and the title of one of his/her publications on the same topic:

_____

_____

2. Search for musicology articles by Kenneth Kreitner in QuickSearch (http://catalogquicksearch.memphis.edu) and JSTOR. Describe the differences and explain how you revised your search to find the relevant articles and not book/recording reviews:

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3. Search for a composer/topic related to your project. Briefly describe what is available in each and how it might be useful for your project.

RILM:_____

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RISM:_____

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RIPM:_____

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