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A Fireworks Display of Library Instruction

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Abstract

Instructing students on how to use the library and the databases in one setting, especially when there is only 50 minutes, can be extremely overwhelming for the students and instructor. This session covered tips that can be used in the interview process with the professor, creating a flipped classroom or blended instruction opportunities to enhance the learning process (including pre or post-session), as well as demonstrating guides for assisting students in database searching techniques. Finally, the session ended with ways to get buy-in from professors about tutorials and guides used outside the lessons.

Keywords
Library instruction, interview, database search, buy-in, instructional activites

A Fireworks Display of Library Instruction

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Keywords:

Library instruction, flipped classroom, database search, buy-in

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Instructing students on how to use the library and the databases in one sitting, especially when the session is only 50 minutes, can be extremely overwhelming for the students and instructor. This session covered tips that can be used in the interview process with the professor, creating a flipped classroom or blended instruction opportunities to enhance the learning process (including pre or post-session), as well as demonstrating guides for assisting students in database searching techniques. Finally, the session ended with ways to get buy-in from professors about tutorials and guides used outside the lessons.

Introduction

The first time in a library instruction class can be overwhelming for all parties involved. It has been my experience when teaching first year students about the libraries, that it is not their top priority. I hear many of them talk about their heavy class loads while trying to juggle full time jobs. Therefore, it is important to take appropriate steps in order to help students get the most out of these fifty-minute library sessions.

Step 1 - Gather resources

It is vital for the instructor to gather the resources and activities needed to make the learning experience fruitful such as: think- pair-share, one-minute paper, group work, jigsaw classroom, gallery walks, concept maps or graphic organizers, instructional videos and testimonials.

Think-Pair-Share

According to Kaddoka (2013), the think-pair-share activity was first developed by Professor Frank Lyman and his colleagues at the University of Maryland in 1981 (p.4). This activity is a great way to begin a session. First, students think or write for a couple minutes about a topic or a question; second, they pair up with a classmate to discuss what they thought about; finally, they share with the rest of the class. This assists students in becoming more comfortable with the session.

One-minute Paper

Angelo and Cross (1993) developed the one-minute paper classroom assessment technique, also known as the half-sheet response. This technique allows students to respond in written word what they think about a topic and how to go about researching it. This assessment strategy also can assist students in linking prior knowledge about a topic and what they want to still learn about it.

Group Work

A group of students, usually four to six students, are assigned a topic (see Example 1).

Example 1 – Example of Group worksheet

Group:

Topic:

Keywords:

Enter the keywords you can search for regarding your topic to get the more effective results:

How many results did you find? _____

How did you limit or expand your results?
_____
_____
_____
_____

What strategies do you find most useful?
_____
_____
_____
_____

What strategies do you find least useful?
_____
_____
_____

Together, they decide on keywords to use when searching in an online database. They record the number of results, the strategies used, what worked as well as what didn't, and how they limited or expanded their results. This helps students expand their skills and learn from each other. This type of group work, and the jigsaw classroom explained below, are great examples of cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is helpful in motivation because, according to Buchanan & McDonough (2014b), "there is safety in numbers for the students, especially when you are presenting them with problems to solve" (p. 40). Since the workings of a library may be unexplored territory for students, it is vital to create a learning environment conducive to collaboration.

Jigsaw Classrooms

The jigsaw classroom was first developed in the early 1970s by Elliot Aronson and his students in order to reduce racial conflict (Aronson, 1978). It has expanded to the group teaching technique that is still in use today. Jigsaw classrooms assist students in becoming experts and teachers in a particular area. Each group of students is assigned a different topic or search tool such as a database. They receive information on a topic and work on developing it. Buchanan & McDonough (2014b) have provided an

example of the set up in Figure 1 (p. 50). Initially, the four students learning about topic 1 are are at the first table. Each student is assigned to a color. They are given a designated amount of time to research the topic.

Figure 1
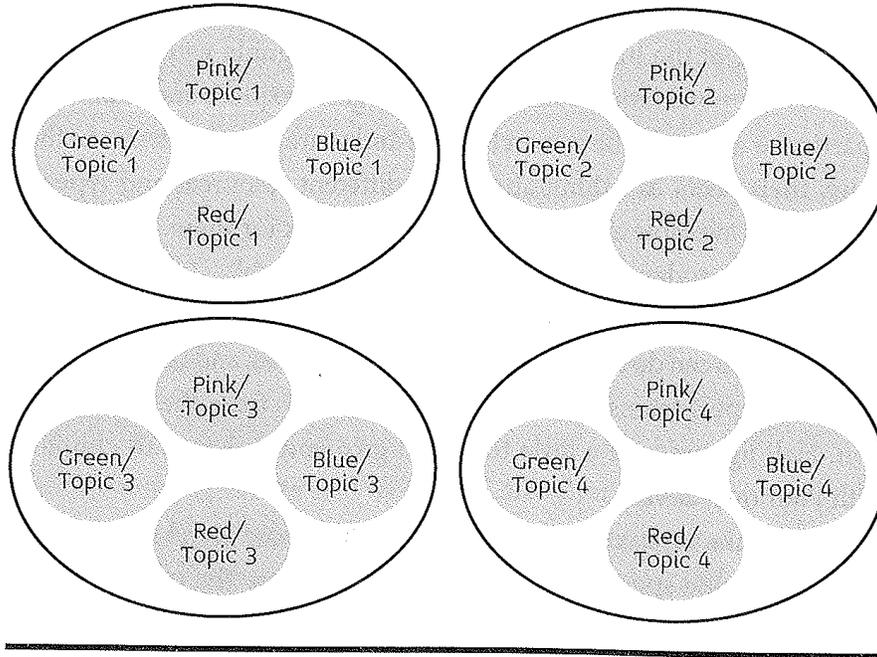
The students move around so that there is one student at each table for each topic. Each table consists of 1 person from each topic and is then grouped by color as in the example in figure 2 (Buchanan & McDonough, 2014b, p. 51). The students then teach each other.
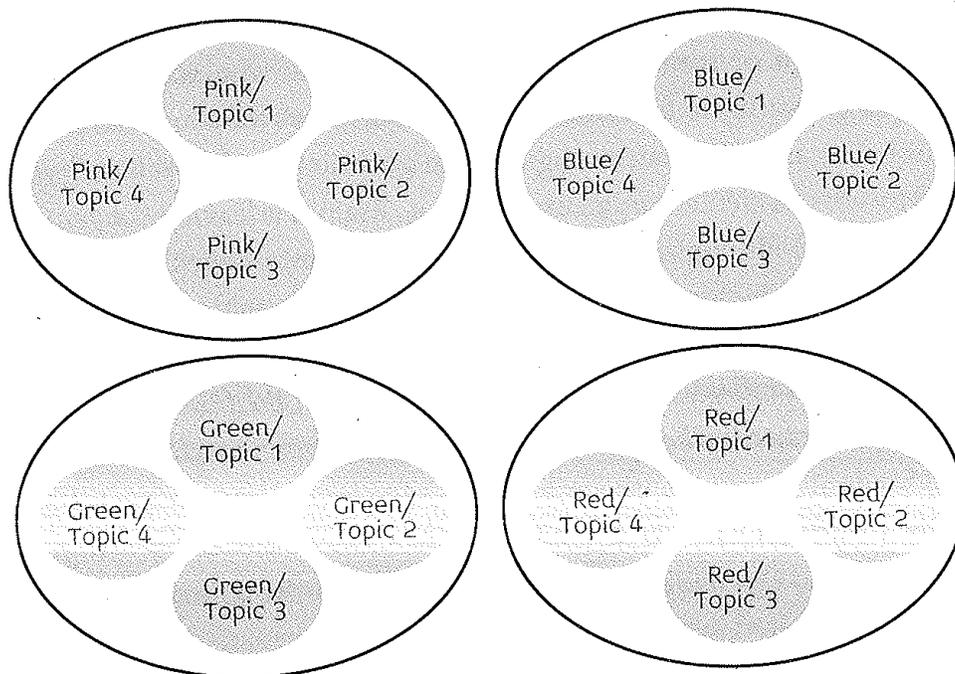
Figure 2

Gallery Walk

The Gallery Walk strategy was developed by Bowman (2005). Buchanan & McDonough (2014b) tell us that "in a gallery walk, the instructor gives students a prompt (usually a question or set of questions), and asks student to write or draw a response" (p. 46). These are then placed on the walls to form the gallery. Students can view the work and make comments with sticky notes or stickers as they learn tips and ideas from their classmates.

Concept Charts & Graphic Organizers

One way to make a useful concept chart is to think of at least three main concepts. (see example 2).

Example 2– Concept Chart

Concept 1 - technology

- technology or
- computer
- or
- internet use or
- Online*

& Concept 2 - Teaching

- Teach* or
- Train* or
- instruct*

& Concept 3 – Older Adults

- "baby boomers" or
- "older generations" or
- elderly
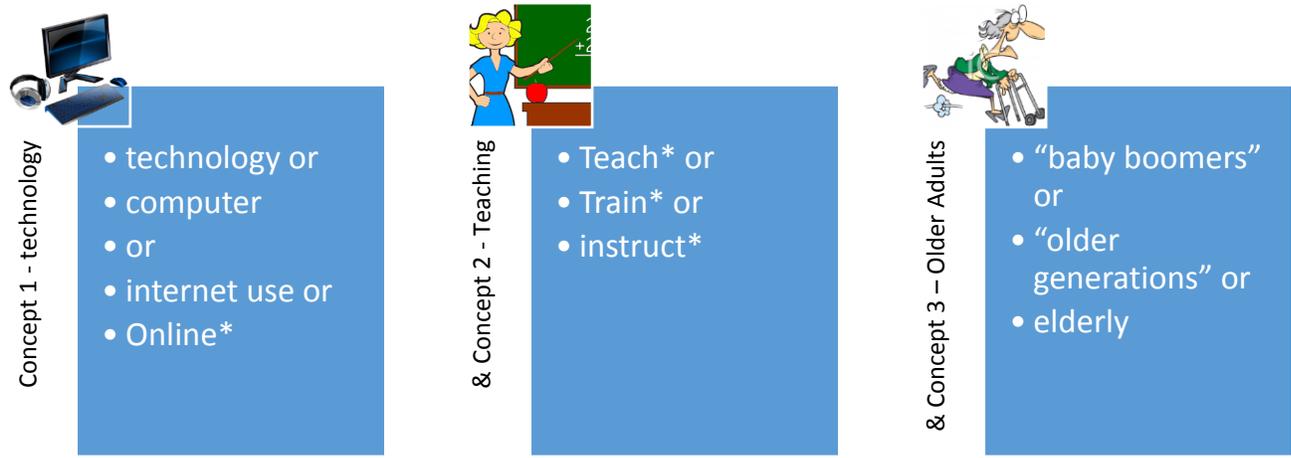
Under each concept, students are prompted to come up with different words that can be used to get the results they want. For instance, another word for teach would be instruct. This helps students visualize how to do advanced searching. If they type teach* or instruct*, the database will search for articles or books that contain words that begin with either teach or instruct. The next concept is added and so on.

Another example of a graphic organizer is referred to as KWL (Know, Wonder, Learn). This type of structure is a great way for students to prepare for searching by listing what they already know and what they want to know. During the session or after, students then record what they learned during the lesson in the last section. One way to accomplish this is displayed in example 3. Buchanan & McDonough (2014b) provide a graphic organizer similar to this that will also help students organize their KWL information (p.48).

Example 3– KWL Graphic Organizer

What I already know about the topic . . ..

Topic:

What I want to learn about the topic . . ..

Ideas I have to explore . ..
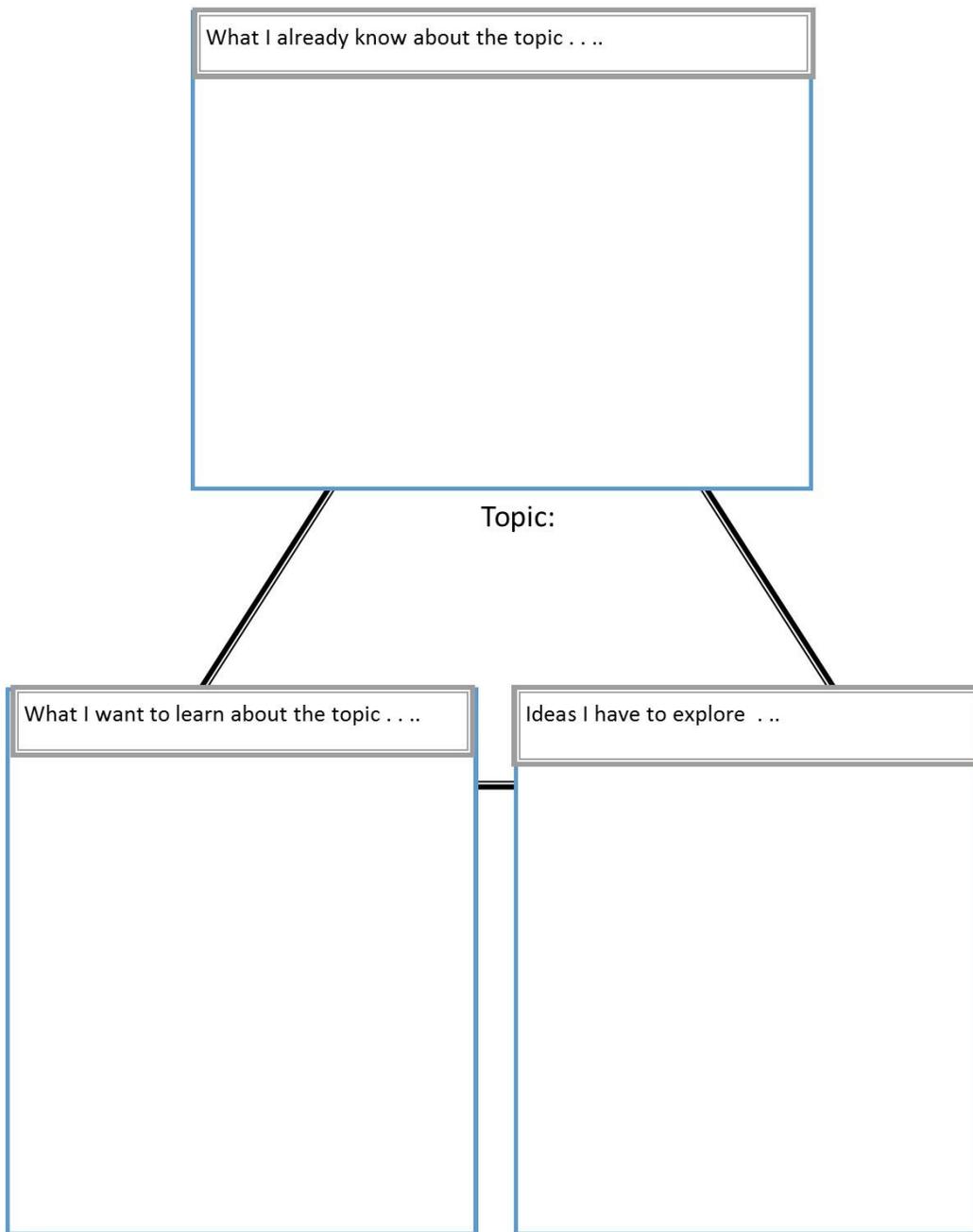
Instructional Videos

Providing these videos ahead of time can provide more time during the class period in order to allow students more hands-on time. Using Camtasia Studio allows one to create a video of a program or desktop with sound and then to modify it with tools such as call outs, zooming, quizzes and closed captioning. Quizzes can be added in at any time during the production, with results emailed to instructor. Another option is to create a "Guide on the Side". This tool is two frames, one showing a website and the other showing instructions for that website. Quizzes and links can be added to this tool in order to test students' knowledge.

Testimonials

When there are successful sessions and when professors are particularly pleased or the students are fully engaged in an activity, make note of those moments or ask the professors to provide feedback as these testimonials can be useful in the interview with another professor, with the students in the session, and in any follow-up sessions in order to acquire buy-in from the professor.

Step 2- Contacting the Professor

It is key to put together an interview script when working with a professor or graduate assistant. According to Buchanan & McDonough (2014a), it is not enough to use an online form to acquire information. Having a real conversation with the professor is vital for all parties to be satisfied with the instruction results. This interview will assist in making sure that the demographics of the class are understood and that the desired outcome is clear. This becomes a negotiation process between the library instructor and professor. Some questions to ask include the class size, the intended skills gained, how the class typically interacts with each other, what activities will help them learn more fully, the structure of the assignment, the due date, are they open to a follow-up session, and are they open to assigning videos as homework. The instructor should schedule a time with the professor to meet, either in person or online. Emailing should be a last resort as the primary form of communication. It can be harder to share information and to discuss the impact of the different tools and options available through email.

Step 3 – Collaboration

When meeting with the professor, an instructor should have testimonials ready when making suggestions. One way to accomplish would be to keep a folder, electronically or in paper, with feedback from students as well as professors detailing the results and evaluations of previous instruction. This will assist in showing that these activities are helpful and it encouraging buy-in. However, it is also vital to keep in mind that an activity that works well for one class may not work for the next. The professor should know by this point in the semester which tools will benefit the students the most. It is essential to get consensus on the structure of the lesson plan. Together, the instructor and professor design the lesson so that the best learning outcome can be achieved. They should discuss the possibilities of providing a follow-up session to cover more hands-on time or further instruction.

Step 4 – Lesson Plans

Lesson plans should contain anticipatory planning which consists of three components: overview, linkage, and initial attention. An overview of the intended outcome should be included. It consists of a brief explanation of the lesson and objectives. When creating objectives, they should contain three facets: measurement, behavior action and condition. Although some researchers and teachers have used different terminology for these facets, the outcome and goal is the same. Measurement is the desired learning outcome or criterion. Behavior action is the desired level of thought. Condition is the purposeful methodology and specifies what circumstances the learner is expected to demonstrate. Mager (2012) goes further into defining objectives and how to make them meaningful for students. When instructing college students, objectives should be written with a higher level of thinking. This consists of: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. These cognitive learning levels are also commonly referred to as "Bloom's Taxonomy" which was developed by Benjamin Bloom in 1956. Rex Heer, a professor at Iowa State University in 2012, developed a model which was a revision of Bloom's Taxonomy. He designed learning objectives based on combinations of cognitive process and knowledge dimensions.

Example 1: After getting a better understanding of what popular databases exist for college students, students will assess their knowledge by using the "KWL" strategy to search for 25-30 articles on the topic provided.

Example 2: After watching a 10 minute video on "Navigating the Webpage", college freshmen will identify at least 5-8 tips found in the video.

In order to help students prepare better for the lesson to get the most out of it, it is vital to for the instructor to link the new learning to past knowledge or experiences. This will not only encourage learning, but assist in grabbing their attention. Creating common experiences from which to initiate instruction will help students focus more on the lesson and it will pique interest.

Step 5 – Provide Resources and Setup the Classroom

Before the session, the instructor should make sure that the professor has provided the links to the videos at least a week in advance so that students have enough time to view them. Make sure they are also up-to-date. It is not uncommon for library webpages to be updated on a regular basis and a video that was created three months ago may no longer be accurate. On the day of the instruction session, the instructor needs to arrive early to the classroom to arrange the tables and chairs so they are conducive to the desired outcome. Check to see if laptops need to be fully charged and the instructional computer is functioning properly. The instructor should have enough handouts and write objectives on the board for the desired outcome. Sometimes there are hiccups in instruction. More than likely, it will be a technical issue such as the computer becoming hung-up or the internet or page going down. Be prepared to share tips on the whiteboard or audibly in case this happens.

Step 6 – Instruct

The instructor should be familiar with the lesson plan, to make it flow smoothly. He or she begins with the overview and review, then provides appropriate linkage in order to grab the attention of the students. The instructor should provide plenty of time for the activity and leave the last ten minutes of class time for review and questions. During this time, he or she recommends other databases that would be beneficial. It is also important to show the students that they are the priority and to show passion for teaching. Some suggestions of this include: silencing the cell phone, turning off all chats and alerts, being

alert and attentive to the needs of the students, asking though-provoking questions, smile and show excitement, and seek feedback to insure quality instruction.

Step 7 – Follow-up and getting buy-in

After the session is over, the instructor should meet with the professor to discuss the lesson and record any successes. Other classes may have chosen to come back for follow-up sessions, so this information would be useful to share with the professor. This is one way that the professor will buy-in to future sessions and will continue to come back with future classes. When suggesting further instruction or hands-on time, the instructor should be flexible and recall that it is about what is appropriate for the class.

Conclusion

Making the most out of fifty-minute library instructional sessions can be very challenging. To make the most out of the time, it is very important to follow a seven step process. First of all, gather resources. Personally, I have found instructional videos provided to the students before the instruction session to be very effective. I developed quizzes in the videos. When I questioned students about the material from the video, they were able to answer them within 100% accuracy. I have students and professors say that they find the graphic organizers as extremely helpful in organizing information. Secondly, schedule an interview with the professor to gather the demographics of the class. Professors have a greater understanding of their class and which modes are more effective. When I met with one professor, we talked about the different activities. She chose the one that she thought would be best for her students. This connects with the third step of collaboration. The fourth step of creating a lesson plan is not completely necessary, but I have found it helps structure your time to get the most quality instruction out of the session. Knowing the objectives is key to success. I then provide the appropriate handouts or videos to the class, making sure I have enough. While instructing the class, I keep in mind what was agreed upon with the professor and then check with him or her about a follow-up session. Following these steps will help make the learning experiences for the students much more productive.

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