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What's art got to do with politics?

Show me the evidence

Faculty expect students to integrate appropriate sources for their assignments with a research component and rely on collaborations with library subject specialists to support student needs. Teaching students to build their information literacy skills by using the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education contributes to increasing their proficiency for college-level research. Aspects important to this endeavor are learning about academic literature, choosing topics and learning background information, and finding and evaluating sources. Students learn how to construct their own academic authority, how to insert themselves into the ongoing scholarly conversation, and that searching can be nonlinear and iterative. Collaboration with course faculty encourages students who tend to shy away from the library.[1] Avoiding the library is not uncommon for students, who then struggle alone with elements of their assignment that require research help.[2] Hence the classroom visibility of subject specialist work builds student awareness of the library and prompts them to be proactive when doing library research.

The goal of a subject specialist is to build the core competency of students to use library resources and those specific to the discipline. The online world culture and global studies course at New York City College of Technology covers the political landscape of the Latin America diaspora and the colonial legacy that influences the historical struggles of the people of these lands. Three elements of the Framework—Authority is Constructed and Contextual, Scholarship as Conversation, and Searching as Strategic Exploration—were connected to a multicultural lesson for this course,[3] which celebrates diversity as an asset. Being intentional about incorporating representation into instructional work aligns with the diversity goals of the library.

The New York City College of Technology campus is characterized by a number of cultures and identities; 73 percent of the students speak a non-English language at home.[4] A large body of scholarship supports the merits of using instructional materials that reflect representation; culturally inclusive curriculums are beneficial to the students' academic experience.[5] Librarians must work to intentionally include diverse instruction to ensure that students have tools to develop how they conceptualize, interpret, and make judgements about information.[6] Further, the learning environment should be compatible with who they are.[7] Validating students' authentic self and creating a welcoming classroom environment helps counteract the institutional indifference that sometimes occurs. Many scholars have studied the nuances of inclusive teaching by discipline; Jerome Branche, John W. Mullennix, and

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Ellen R. Cohn specifically note the importance of promoting diversity in an online teaching environment.[8] This article outlines ways to acknowledge the diverse identities within college using the Framework, specifically the three frames mentioned above.

Assignment and learning outcomes

One of the course's learning outcomes is for the students to critically assess an issue relevant to the course and present oral and written analysis supported by evidence. The assignment asks students to do an oral research presentation on a Latin American country. The instructor shared that every semester the challenge is to steer students away from presenting food recipes and describing festivals of their assigned country. These topics are important but superficial in comparison to the depth and breadth of the cultural, economic, historical, political, and social material covered in the course with respect to European colonization. The course instructor instituted a mandatory student consultation before their presentation to steer students away from popular topics. As they begin their foray into research, they investigate more complex questions and deepen their knowledge by asking additional questions.

With these challenges in mind, as the Latin America and Puerto Rican Studies subject specialist, I taught students strategies to brainstorm suitable topics for their presentations. Our campus epitomizes our global society, and I welcomed the opportunity to design a lesson plan to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of this online class. The instructor shared that classes are consistently composed of a Latinidad community of developing English language learners.[9] Faculty must understand the role race and ethnicity plays in the physical and online classroom to address the needs of their students.

Building the mosaic: Bridging social justice to the Framework

In this section, I demonstrate how the frames Authority is Constructed and Contextual, Scholarship as Conversation, and Searching as Strategic Exploration were applied to a discipline-specific one-shot course to develop students' information literacy. The topics of art and artists' social justice activism were integrated into the instruction to engage students and acclimate them into scholarly research. Combining the teaching of art research with social justice engages students and awakens their awareness of social struggles.[10] Teaching with art is more than aesthetic contemplation; it visually engages students to explore disruptions in society. Students bring rich experiences to the classroom, and my aim is not to lecture and have them try to retain everything about research in an hour.

I instead introduce the art of David Alfaro Siqueiros, a Mexican artist who created works such as *Echoes of Scream*, *Portrait of Bourgeoisie*, *La Nueva Democracia*, *La Marcha de la Humanidad*, and *The Sob*. Siqueiros's works depict political issues, and he believed that art was a conduit to expressing struggles in the society. His work is highly compelling, which piques the students' interest, motivating them to become highly motivated interlocutors. This approach of promoting representation and identity while teaching with the Framework matters to students. Their searches focus on exploring different experiences between Latinx communities and the impactful legacies of colonialism in each territory.

Practical applications of the Framework

Searching as Strategic Exploration

Students who are new to searching for sources in an academic context must develop their

understanding of the complexity of the types of information sources available and its relevance to their needs as well as the practical knowledge of using the available tools, such as databases. Using a group activity when applying the Strategic Exploration frame stimulates students' creativity as they brainstorm keywords. They learn how foundational keywords are when navigating databases to yield useful results relevant to their topics. Students are placed in small groups and invited to brainstorm topics and generate search terms by sharing stories with each other. They generate the name of a highly visible person or an issue from their country that has caused good or harm to them personally, or to the community that they came from. For example, one student identified the following keywords to initiate a search:

"Billy Joya Améndola es the general de of death that made my family desapear [*sic*: disappear]"

Some elect to continue along the vein of Siqueiros and find more information related to his activism. Some search terms students have produced based on Siqueiros's works and his activism are "Spanish Civil War," "Marxist," "farmers," "government," "industrialist," "humanity," "oppression," "fascist," "insurrection," "labor movement," "revolution," and so on. The goal of this activity is to help students select and narrow their topic and then formulate search terms. Beginning with art that focuses on social justice leads students to critically analyze world problems as they investigate a topic.

As students discover information, they become more curious. Students begin to move from using natural language to specific keywords. This provides an opportunity to discuss abstract searches or colloquial terms and convert them to more searchable or indexed terms. At times, the help they need may be more technical in understanding how to navigate the interface of the library's discovery layer or using Boolean operators effectively. They gain confidence by using synonyms and related terms about their topic while searching the library's resources. As they persist with their searches, they develop new questions and continue to use and value library resources. New perspectives emerge and they begin to appreciate the iterative nature of research.

Authority is Constructed and Contextual

Some of the cornerstones of teaching from the Authority is Constructed and Contextual frame are facilitated discussions on the expertise of the author(s) and their diverse ideas, biases, and opposing alternatives of the worldview. Students are asked to identify evidence in a sample work presented and discuss their process. They are excited to build knowledge. At times they refute what scholars say and they suggest turning to an authority they know from their country who is more knowledgeable of a particular event. Students critically question what dominates as knowledge and discuss why local perspectives are missing from scholarly sources.

Scholarship as Conversation

As students engage in this concept, attribution is prioritized per the course instructor's urging. One of the overarching goals is to have students engage in the scholarly dialogue by calling the students' attention to how Siqueiros combined politics and art and having

them explore similar struggles in the Latin American country they have chosen.[11] Students begin to recognize that they are entering into an ongoing conversation on this topic. They accumulate citations and evidence for their presentation.

Final touches: Sustaining knowledge

Students are encouraged to reflect upon their discoveries. Due to the limited time of the session, they do a round robin report on the most surprising detail about Siqueiros's work and its significance to the Mexican people. Reflection allows the students to deepen their understanding as they recall the process. This is always enlightening and allows for an opportunity to offer outreach beyond the session. Students are invited to a Slack channel and encouraged to continue the conversation in the digital classroom. Sample files of multicultural artists similar to Siqueiros are posted in Slack to provide asynchronous and synchronous support. It is helpful to have multiple opportunities to increase participation in an online class. Classes are recorded with closed captions and forwarded to the instructor for students to interact with the material at their own pace. Recording the session makes it accessible to students, which demonstrates my commitment to inclusive teaching practices.

One of my philosophies about culturally inclusive teaching is adhering to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, including communicating in multiple modes.[12] This is especially helpful for language acquisition learners as often students are at different levels with various reading and listening skills. The captions are a contributing tool to facilitate the comprehension for English language learners.[13] In a diverse classroom, it is not unusual for students to need additional support with decoding as they engage with the materials.

Conclusion

Interweaving artistic works with the Framework promotes social justice and information literacy. It connects students with their community and builds their critical consciousness as they examine pre- and post-colonial Latin American societies. The Framework sorts the threshold concepts into practices and dispositions, which helps to guide the lesson design to engage students in their information research. The values embedded in the frames support instruction that is student-centered because innovative ideas can be implemented in multiple ways. In applying these cores, a flexible lesson could look like the aforesaid. Using high-quality resources and topics focused on Siqueiros's work helps examine important societal issues that are relevant to students. The multiple approaches in the Framework support dimensional ways for instructing and learning. Stimulating discussions on defining authority and integrating activities for students to participate in connects to the practice elements of the frames. Through active engagement students delve more deeply into perspectives and worldview which supports cultural competency.

Teaching with the Framework provides an open-minded foundation for teaching information literacy through a more culturally competent lens.[14] Although students have easy access to information at their fingertips, a more strategic approach is needed to acquire information that is credible and appropriate for their purpose, as well as knowledge. Art can evoke strong emotions and it is an approach to engage students in the research process and cultivate their proficiencies. Sharing these pedagogical practices of combining art with social justice, featuring individuals that students identify with, may lead to new actions by library

instructors. Fostering a community around more equitable instructional practices benefits diverse students, emphasizes how information literacy concepts connect to the Framework, and provides sustainable practices for this work. ✒

Notes

1.   Andria L. Tieman and Megan E. Black, "Exploration of Library Outreach to Non-traditional Students," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (Spring 2017): 198–205, https://doi.org/10.5860/rusq.56n3.198.

2.   Christina C. Wray and Renee C. Montgomery, "Bridging the Skill Gap: Helping Non-Traditional Students Develop Research Skills When They Need It Most" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Adult Higher Education Alliance, Orlando, Florida, March 7–8, 2019), https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED597794.

3.   In this article, I have used multicultural and culturally inclusive teaching interchangeably.

4.   "City Tech Fact Sheet 2022–2023," accessed January 30, 2021, http://www.citytech.cuny.edu/about-us/docs/facts.pdf.

5.   Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 3rd ed., Multicultural Education Series (New York: Teachers College Press, 2018).

6.   James Elmborg, "Critical Information Literacy: Implications for Instructional Practice," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 32, no. 2 (March 1, 2006): 192–99, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2005.12.004.

7.   Elmborg, "Critical Information Literacy."

8.   Jerome Branche, John W. Mullennix, and Ellen R. Cohn, *Diversity across the Curriculum: A Guide for Faculty in Higher Education* (Bolton: Anker, 2007).

9.   They are required to take either a co-requisite English course or be enrolled in a co-requisite course meant for ESOL learners.

10. Karen Keifer-Boyd, "Arts-Based Research as Social Justice Activism: Insight, Inquiry, Imagination, Embodiment, Relationality," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 4, no. 1 (2011): 3–19.

11. Alicia Azuela, "El Machete and Frente a Frente: Art Committed to Social Justice in Mexico," *Art Journal* 52, no. 1 (1993): 82–87, https://doi.org/10.2307/777306.

12. "Universal Design for Learning," Center for Teaching Innovation, accessed May 30, 2022, https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/designing-your-course/universal-design-learning.

13. Bryan K. Dallas, Amanda K. McCarthy, and Greg Long, "Examining the Educational Benefits of and Attitudes toward Closed Captioning among Undergraduate Students," *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 16, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 50–65. "Captioning to Support Literacy," Power Up What Works, accessed May 30, 2022, https://www.ctdinstitute.org/sites/default/files/file_attachments/Captioning%20to%20Support%20Literacy%20FINAL_0.pdf.

14. Karen Manheim Teel and Jennifer E. Obidah, *Building Racial and Cultural Competence in the Classroom: Strategies from Urban Educators* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008).