Edward Gloor and Kevin Adams

Building community

DIY punk strategies for the library classroom

Critical information literacy instruction requires that instructors enter into a community with students. A major challenge of library instruction is the limited amount of time that the students and instructor have to interact with one another. Creating a community with students in an hour is a tall task, and one that often butts up against the culture that has already been set during normal class sessions. However, that does not mean that setting a culture or building a community in the library classroom is impossible.

Do-It-Yourself (DIY) punk is a subculture of punk that emphasizes community responsibility and reliance. DIY punk shows are punk shows that are organized by band and community members, often in small intimate spaces, at low cost to organizers, performers, and participants. These shows operate in a limited window of time and create a culture through shared participation. Like DIY punk spaces, critical library classrooms require commitment and effort from all involved. Both can and will atrophy without community engagement. A culture of respect and care must be upheld by all members; it cannot be dictated by one member.

Both DIY punk communities and critical information literacy can have lasting impacts on participants. However, DIY does hold the advantage of active engagement outside of live shows. Community members are oftentimes connected through music, art, and friendship outside of shows and can continue to build on and discuss the scene outside of show venues. This advantage allows DIY punk communities to set a helpful example for others looking to build community.

In this essay, we build on the scholarship of other critical information literacy practitioners that draw on punk strategies, such as Amy Gilgan, Cailtin Shanley, and Laura Chance, who emphasize the importance of incorporating social justice into the library classroom, collaborating with students, seeking those whose voices are left out, and integrating nontraditional sources into library instruction and student research.[1] We build on their work by exploring our own lived experiences in DIY punk communities to draw out strategies that we usein the information literacy classroom to answer the question: how do we build community in the short timeframe of a one-shot?

DIY punk and critical information literacy

Critical information literacy

Critical information literacy has been conceptualized and practiced for more than a decade.

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Drawing from its roots in critical pedagogy, as Eamon Tewell states, "At its core, critical information literacy is an attempt to render visible the complex workings of information so that we may identify and act upon the power structures that shape our lives."[2] Our understanding of critical information literacy is informed by the current literature, but is primarily driven by an application of the writings of bell hooks and Paulo Freire to library teaching practices. This includes two elements: classroom structure and classroom content. We structure our classroom around building community and sharing power. In our classroom content we strive to be clear about the social, political, and economic implications of information literacy.

Freire makes explicit the connection between education, politics, and oppression. In his focus on liberation, he stresses the importance of working together with students. "We must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response—not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action."[3] Our critical information literacy classrooms pursue similar goals: to be action-driven through anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-capitalist content.

Drawing on hooks' writing in *Teaching to Transgress*, we seek to take the short time we have with students to enter into a mutual community of learning. hooks states, "When I enter the classroom at the beginning of the semester the weight is on me to establish that our purpose is to be, for however brief a time, a community of learners together. It positions me as a learner."[4] As library instructors, we do not always enter the classroom at the beginning of the semester, and we have an even shorter time, but we also want to establish a community of learners.

Community is the antithesis of the banking model of education. Creating community is the forming of the foundation that practices like power sharing and student expression are built upon.

Do-It-Yourself punk

Punk goes beyond music and can be thought of as an embodied identity that includes personal expression through music, art, fashion, attitude, and much more. DIY is a punk ethos and there is no agreed-upon definition. Rather than attempt an authoritative definition, we provide a few key tenants of DIY punk.

- DIY punk community members share responsibility for maintaining and growing their local punk scenes.
- DIY punk community members understand the needs of the scene and do their own work accordingly, so that they are not reliant on corporate labels, promoters, or venues.
- DIY punk communities practice radical dissent by rejecting mainstream movements and embracing local, grassroots, community-building practices.

Our experiences inform our teaching

To answer the question, "How do we build a community of learners in a one-shot session?," we looked to our own experiences outside academia—in DIY punk communities. In this exploration, we saw that our teaching practices were informed by our experiences in these communities.

Kevin

My introduction to DIY punk shows and spaces happened in Lafayette, Indiana. I started going to shows at a converted warehouse. The common theme throughout these shows was that the community of musicians and showgoers were building something together, for one another. Through the music and the people in the space I experienced a connectedness that felt like immediate community in the short hour and a half of a punk show.

Later, I moved to Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, where I attended graduate school and found a scene that was more explicit about creating community than any other that I had experienced. Show organizers looked not just to band members, but to regular attendees to help in constructing the scene. Everyone was encouraged to flyer the town for shows and actively promote and invite folks online and off to participate. This engagement was reflected in the shows as well. In tiny, intimate basements, the audience and the band would be practically on top of one another, and once people started moving around, everyone was playing an active role in creating the show experience.

While I always participated in DIY punk spaces as an audience member, the shows in Champaign-Urbana were unique in that they broke down the distinction between organizer, band member, and audience member to build a radical community. This is where Edward and I met.

Edward

Growing up in the Denver DIY punk scene, specifically the hardcore scene, taught me a lot about the ways that the people within a community can shape it to function differently than other communities built around the same activity. What the scene looked like in 2011 is drastically different from the way it looks now. Physicality has always been a part of hardcore punk, but Denver frequently had people getting intentionally hurt by others at shows, and fights were a common occurrence. Show attendance dwindled and so did the number of venues that would host hardcore shows.

What revitalized the Denver scene was a youth movement that insisted on making shows happen and intentionally did not book bands associated with violence in the scene. They created a new culture and ejected people that were unsafe for other members of the scene. It took years of intentional shaping, and now Denver is a hotbed for hardcore music.

DIY punk has the potential to create a community that is welcoming and safe, and because I grew up in Denver, I understand that it must be intentionally built and maintained. This understanding translates directly to building community in the library classroom.

Strategies for critical information literacy from DIY Punk

By reflecting on our experiences in DIY punk, we were able to identify several strategies that we also utilize in implementing critical information literacy: community building, sharing power, and explicit messaging.

Community building

Critical information literacy practitioners can set out to build a community, but if the library values and classroom values do not reflect each other, the classroom community will struggle to grow. Library values are strengthened by building solidarity among library workers. Just as those in DIY punk spaces engage as a community outside of shows, students

engage with the library in many ways outside of the classroom. Creating a supportive community among library workers creates a culture of care that extends to students. There are many ways to engage with DIY spaces, and those that provide support through mutual aid and supporting local bands, labels, and venues have the potential to be spaces that are more welcoming to new members.

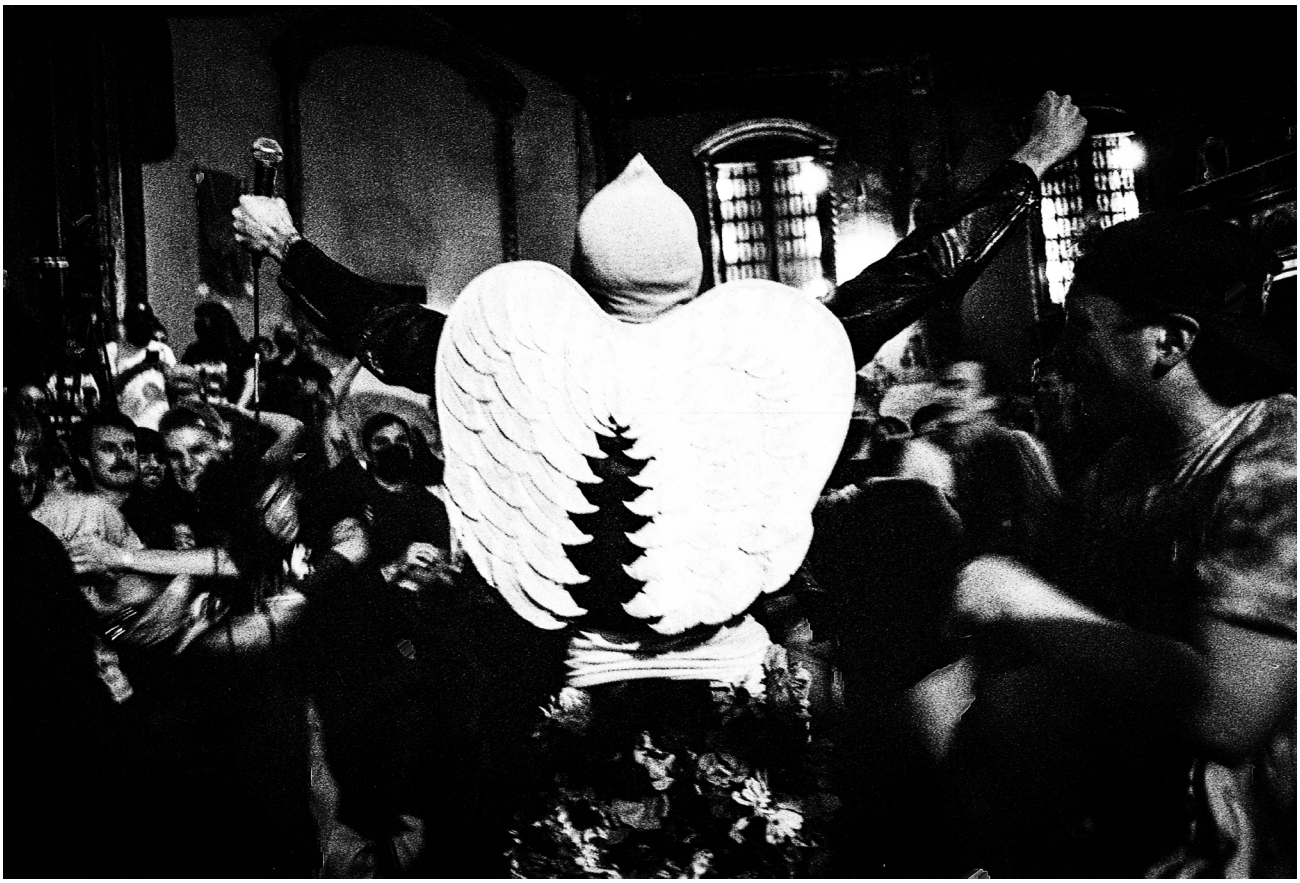

Image 1: Singer of the band Goon stands in front of the crowd at Convulse Records Fest, arms outstretched with balled fists. They are wearing a balaclava, leather jacket, costume angel wings, and ghillie-style pants covered in fake flowers. Photo credit: Copyright of this image is retained by Joe Lacey (@joexlacey) and used by the authors with permission.

The community can extend outside of the library as well. Building critical information literacy into curricula in partnership with faculty can support the foundations of the connections that library instructors are aiming for. Similar to promoting shows in DIY punk, this requires connecting with like-minded faculty outside of the classroom. Librarians may follow the example of these promoters by seeking faculty that share similar values such as critical pedagogy, anti-oppression, or community building. One of the key ways that DIY community members build and strengthen their connections is by continually showing up for one another. Once librarians have found faculty with shared values, they can show up for faculty by supporting their initiatives.

Sharing power

By sharing power in the classroom, instructors can demonstrate to students that they are serious when they proclaim that what students bring to the classroom adds value to the experience. From hooks we learn that instructors will never be able to give up all power because, ultimately, they do have a responsibility for the class.[5] In the same way that people

who book DIY shows are responsible for running the show, they still rely on the showgoers and musicians to set the mood and tone for the show. Ultimately, it is those two groups that make the show what it is. Promoters provide structure while bands and audiences give the shows form.

In a conversation with bell hooks, Ron Scapp explains another barrier to sharing power in the classroom: "I notice many students have difficulty taking seriously what they themselves have to say because they are convinced that the only person who says anything of note is the teacher."[6] DIY shows break down this barrier by sharing the microphone during performances. The line between performers and audience is blurred or erased when the microphone and stage are shared with the audience. The performer/audience dynamic is further erased when band members dance or mosh in the crowd.

Image 2: A crowd member sings for the band SPY with other audience members singing along at Convulse Records Fest. Photo credit: Copyright of this image is retained by Joe Lacey (@joexlacey) and used by the authors with permission.

Similarly, library instructors can share power by positioning themselves as learners as well as teachers. Students bring experience and expertise from their own lives and fields of study. Encouraging students to share that expertise and creating multiple pathways for engagement can break down the barrier of traditional teacher/student dynamics.

Explicit content

DIY punk is often associated with in-your-face rhetoric and imagery. Many times, at a DIY punk show, the radical lyrics of a song will be all but unintelligible. Instead of letting the message remain a mystery, band members will speak about the meaning of their songs. In our time going to shows we have heard bands explicitly share their thoughts between songs

on political, social, and economic issues such as the war on drugs, immigrant rights, trans rights, sexism, racism, and ableism. Common threads throughout are love and protection for community and people. These messages are reinforced by the environment of the show.

Image 3: Bass player and singer for the band Asbestos with crowd members in the background at Convulse Records Fest. Photo credit: Copyright of this image is retained by Joe Lacey (@joexlacey) and used by the authors with permission.

In the critical information literacy classroom, it is important that instructors are equally explicit. Neutrality in the classroom will not create a welcoming and inclusive environment. Taking cues from Freire and DIY punk, instructors must openly challenge capitalist power structures, the construction of authority, and white supremacist culture.[7] This can be done in not only the content of the course but the way the class is structured. Deliberate structure allows more students to engage with the explicit content that you present in the classroom. Similar to a DIY show, it is important that forms of engagement are not prescriptive. Showgoers can mosh and sing along, or they can simply listen to the music away from the dance floor. Both are welcome. In the classroom, talking and discussion is valuable, but silent participation and reflection can be equally important.

Conclusion

When we consider students to be full people that are collaborators with a shared responsibility in creating the classroom, we are engaging in a liberatory practice.[8] Creating a community in the classroom starts first with the instructor, but without the commitment of everyone involved, it will not take hold. Library classroom culture may be burdened by the limited time that librarians have to interact with students, but by looking at DIY punk spaces and the way that they develop ongoing culture in time-limited spaces, library

instructors can begin to restructure classrooms to create inclusive, self-governing communities that value student participation.

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Notes

1. Amy Gilgan, "Teaching with Riot Grrrl: An Active Learning Session at the Intersections of Authenticity and Social Justice," in *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbook*, vol. 2, ed. Nicole Pagowsky and Kelly McElroy (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016); Caitlin Shanley and Laura Chance, "Search and Destroy: Punk Rock Tactics for Library Instruction," in *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbook*, vol. 1, ed. Nicole Pagowsky and Kelly McElroy (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016).
2. Eamon Tewell, "Putting Critical Information Literacy into Context: How and Why Librarians Adopt Critical Practices in Their Teaching," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, October 12, 2016, https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2016/putting-critical-information-literacy-into-context-how-and-why-librarians-adopt-critical-practices-in-their-teaching/.
3. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 13th anniversary ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 95–96.
4. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 153.
5. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 153.
6. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 150.
7. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
8. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*.