STEP AWAY FROM THE PODIUM!
A LESSON PLAN FOR PEER LEARNING

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Imagine you are back in your library classroom. Approximately 25 students are trickling in as you write your contact information on the whiteboard and confirm that the computer and projector are working properly. Once the students are seated and checking the latest updates on Facebook, you introduce yourself. A few heads drift upward, but they move back to the computer screens as you begin explaining the goals of the session. You press on and introduce the library catalog and how to search it effectively, simultaneously projecting your demonstration. As you finish, you ask if there are any questions. The room remains quiet, so you direct the students to look for resources related to their own topics as you walk around the room addressing individual concerns.

You no doubt have conducted or observed sessions like this one—sessions that utilize direct instruction. Direct instruction requires us to stand at the front of the room and lecture for a majority of the class period. We share our knowledge with students through well-prepared, successful examples and ask them to replicate what we demonstrated. According to Hurumi (2009), the steps for direct instruction are: (1) orientation (establish objectives), (2) presentation (explain and demonstrate a new skill), and (3) guided practice (monitor and provide feedback). Most students, however, do not retain much from direct instruction. Morrison and Webb (2009) state that "with little student active participation or mental rehearsal" such lectures "produced the lowest degree of retention for most learners" (p. 266). A key reason for the ineffectiveness of direct instruction is that the lecture and demonstration do not represent a typical research experience, which requires exploration, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

I will admit that I find it difficult to change my routine, and, perhaps like many of you, I had become comfortable conducting sessions using direct instruction. Yet, I realized that the more I talked, the less the students listened (and learned). I was therefore determined to change my style of teaching. Instead of lecturing, I started spending minimal time at the podium and more time facilitating collaborative learning.

Collaborative learning, a term with which you are probably familiar, is a logical alternative to direct instruction. It requires groups to explore an issue defined by the instructor. As a result, individuals learn from one another within a designated group. Jacobson and Xu (2004) state that collaborative learning "holds students responsible for contributing to the learning of the entire group, while they also take responsibility for their own individual learning" (p. 67). In support of collaborative learning, Keyser (2000) says students "will reassure each other while they help each other figure out the steps" (p. 40). Connections to critical thinking have also been examined in relation to collaborative groups and peer learning alike. According to one study, "teams achieve at higher levels of thought and retain information longer than students who work quietly as individuals" (Gokhale, 1995, p. 22). In other words, collaborative learning is more successful than the guided practice used during direct instruction.

Collaborative or peer learning emphasizes the learning that takes place both on an individual level and the group level. In *Teaching Generation M*, Morrison and Webb (2009) emphasize the method's effectiveness, stating "the best way to learn was to prepare to teach someone else the learned skills" (pp. 266-267). To facilitate further learning and retention we need to recognize the potential in peer teaching. Groups should not only prepare to

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teach someone else, they should follow through by teaching the entire class about their findings.

The collaborative or peer learning model is appealing to both students and librarians. Students enjoy peer-to-peer interactions in a low-risk environment. They can explore resources and develop skills without the fear of unfavorable consequences, such as undesirable grades. Students also cover more material in collaborative learning environments. During group presentations in my classes, students often discuss more content than I initially plan. For instance, I have had first-year students discuss the consortial catalog, the link resolver, and interlibrary loan processes within a 50-minute session. For their part, librarians are presented with numerous teaching moments that help keep the content fresh, ultimately reducing burn-out. But perhaps the most important benefit to peer learning for librarians is the exposure to students' research processes and the obstacles that they encounter. Rather than imposing library jargon on students, one can listen to them talk about library research using their natural language. This helps determine how to speak meaningfully with students in future sessions and one-on-one consultations.

Utilizing collaborative or peer learning is only part of the equation for a successful one-shot, as one of my colleagues helped me discover when venting about one of her own sessions. Frustrated, she insisted that students today do not want to learn about research and are not curious. That made me ask myself, "Why do we blame the students?" Isn't it our job to engage them in class, to motivate them to learn? During our session planning processes, we need to anticipate the variety of attitudes that students bring to our classrooms. For example, students have too many distractions, ranging from text messages on their cell phones to having Facebook at their fingertips. Perhaps the most prevalent attitude is what Steven Bell (2007) refers to as IAKT (I Already Know This) syndrome. To make matters worse, students often *expect* the use of innovative technologies; having individual computer workstations is simply not impressive anymore. Furthermore, students do not understand why they are attending a library session, let alone see the connections between research and their everyday lives. Ultimately, these attitudes result in a lack of motivation. To remedy this, we need to understand how to motivate students.

One of the leading scholars of motivational theory in education, John Keller, developed the ARCS theory in the late 1980's. Nearly 25 years later, the theory remains relevant to teacher/librarian training. ARCS is an acronym for Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. On the above right is a chart depicting design tactics in alignment with Keller's motivational constructs (ARCS).

Motivational Constructs	Motivational Design Tactics
Attention	*Inquiry Arousal*—Stimulate curiosity
Relevance	*Motive Matching*—Address specific needs
Confidence	*Success Opportunities*—Opportunities to experience success
Satisfaction	*Natural Consequences*—Meaningful opportunities to apply skills

(Keller, 1987)

If we relate the motivational constructs of the ARCS model to the direct instruction method, we'll see that direct instruction fails to properly motivate students. Specifically, direct instruction does not stimulate students' curiosity. Moreover, relevance may be addressed in a broad sense (stating session objectives), but this does not always clearly match content with students' needs and experiences. If the third construct, confidence, is achieved, it is only done on an individual basis when the librarian offers feedback during guided practice. Note that in larger classes fewer students receive our attention, resulting in a lack of confidence among many. The final construct, satisfaction, does not occur during direct instruction because there is no *meaningful* opportunity to apply the skills learned.

In comparison, peer learning can successfully incorporate at least the first three (A, R, and C) constructs. Let's look at an improved lesson plan—one that takes us away from the podium by using collaborative learning. Overall, the plan involves conducting a starting activity, placing students into groups, facilitating collaborative work time, and concluding with group presentations.

ATTENTION

Possible Design Tactic: Use a starting activity to stimulate curiosity

In order to spark students' curiosity, begin with a starting activity. Examples of starting activities include:

- **Guess-the-Google** (http://grant.robinson.name/projects/guess-the-google/)
  In pairs, students play a free online game that includes 10 timed rounds. Students look at a collage of images available through a Google image search and try to guess the correct keyword that would retrieve all the images.

- **Find It Challenge**
  Give students an article title not available through Google and challenge them to find a copy of the entire article.

- **Where Do I Belong?**
  Students are given labels (magazines, journals, books, etc.) and have to determine if they belong in the library's catalog or a general database. Students move around the room to become part of a designated space representing either tool.

Notice that these activities will most likely result in some failure on behalf of the students. In my experience, for example, students never receive high scores while playing Guess-the-Google. When students answer incorrectly, however, they seem more determined during the next round. Aside from grabbing students' attention and setting the tone of the session, these sorts of starting activities set students up for learning—sometimes through a gentle reminder that they do not know everything related to the library and/or research. Since the students experience some failure they are more open to making improvements. After completion of a starting activity, I suggest explicitly stating the connection between the activity and the forthcoming content.

RELEVANCE

Possible Design Tactic: Distribute a worksheet that clearly relates to the course assignment

Once you have piqued students' interest, you are ready to introduce new concepts and emphasize their relevance to the course assignment. The worksheet should be designed with an awareness of the tools and resources that are acceptable for the course assignment, the students' level of experience, and the session's relevancy to students' individual topics. I suggest distributing a worksheet for two reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, a worksheet helps keep students on task during the session. Second, students will be able to refer back to the worksheet after the session is finished.

The sample worksheet (see Appendix 1) can be customized for a variety of one-shot sessions. The basic features include a place for students to brainstorm various keywords related to their group topic followed by two sections—one that focuses on the catalog and another that focuses on Academic Search Premier. These sections can be customized to include a database other than Academic Search Premier, two different databases, or a database and a Web search tool like Google Scholar.

In groups, students are expected to explore the tools in order to complete the worksheet, which asks for some basic information including book title, call number, and location. The database section requires article and journal titles and asks if a copy of the full article was located. For upper-division students, I have customized this to include an evaluation of each resource to determine whether the article is scholarly or popular.

After briefly discussing the sections of the worksheet, you may offer a quick example of how to brainstorm keywords and synonyms for a topic and point out the locations of search tools. While you will be tempted, it is important that you do not conduct a demonstration. Doing so would infringe on the exploratory process students are about to undertake. Be sure to mention that each group will have to conduct a presentation to the class regarding an interesting or difficult issue that they encountered while completing the worksheet. Assign up to five groups and distribute a unique topic to each. A sample topic might look like the following:

> I am interested in researching information that shows a connection between depression and being overweight. I think I want to focus on middle-school students. I might look for statistics, causes of depression, and what researchers say about middle-school students and body image.

Notice that the topic is more substantial than one word or phrase. Think of the interaction that you might have with a student when she says her topic is teen pregnancy. We practically erupt with questions seeking clarification. Students react the same way when they are asked to work with an assigned topic. Using complete sentences and giving some context allows students to quickly digest the topic so that they can begin brainstorming keywords and completing the worksheet. (In other words, get to the learning!)

CONFIDENCE

Possible Design Tactic: Offer encouragement during collaborative work time and provide positive feedback during group presentations

After groups receive their assigned topics, the librarian should wander from group to group answering any questions and facilitating learning. For example, if you hear a group going in an interesting direction because they have encountered the link resolver or the interlibrary loan form, encourage them to figure out what it is and how it works. Mention that this might be the interesting or difficult issue that they discuss during their group presentation. Groups should be fairly confident before they deliver their presentations because the librarian has already provided positive feedback during their collaborative work time.

Groups should be allotted five minutes each for their presentations and are expected to highlight one issue that they encountered during their research process. Every group member should participate in some way in order to demonstrate their understanding. There are many opportunities for the librarian to insert tips or prompt additional information from groups while groups are presenting. Because the librarian has had discussions with each group earlier in the session, it will be easy to solicit more information. Providing positive feedback as students are giving their presentations will help solidify their confidence in knowing the material and skills. The presentations reinforce students' confidence as they seek approval from their peers, the librarian, and the course instructor (if he or she is in attendance).

SATISFACTION

Possible Design Tactic: Collaborate with course instructors to design graded assignments

Ultimate satisfaction can be achieved only when students complete the assignment for their course instructor and receive a grade, progress to the next sequenced course, etc. When possible, collaborate with course instructors to design graded assignments to further motivate students during the session.

Looking closely at the improved lesson plan, we can see that it is in accordance with the ARCS motivational constructs and, as a result, will motivate students to learn. Encouraging peer learning through collaborative groups that must teach the entire class helps students take ownership of the content. You'll find yourself integrated in the learning process not as a lecturer, but rather as a facilitator—one that has no more need for the podium.

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Research Exploration

List at least 6 keywords/search terms below:

LIBRARY CATALOG

Terms Used:_____

Book Title	Call Number & Location
1.	
2.	
3.	

ACADEMIC SEARCH PREMIER

Terms Used:_____

Article Title	Journal Title	Did you find a copy?
1.		
2.		
3.		