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Unifying Ideas: Building For-Credit Information Literacy Around Themes to Optimize Student Learning

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Unifying ideas

Building for-credit information literacy courses around themes to optimize student learning

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Library Instruction West 2014

"The most glaring mistake in higher education today is the belief that students learn to do research by doing it.

This is absolutely not the case, as countless studies of student research ability have demonstrated."

(Badke, 2008, p. 2)

Prior experience

- Jefferson Community and Technical College in Louisville, Ky.
- 130 GEN: Introduction to Information Resources
  - 3 credits
  - An exploration of the developing information society, different types of libraries, and electronic resources, such as the Internet, online databases, and information management software. Focuses on the nature of information, computer technology, and ethical computing issues.

Background of class

INF (LOR) 101 Research in the Information Age
- 3 credits
- Fulfills General Studies requirement
- Catalog: A course designed to explore the phenomena, activities, and issues surrounding the development, gathering, organization, and use of information and resources in a global community. Designed to acquaint students with best practices in information-seeking behavior for various situational, civic, and scholarly purposes, with specific attention given to the ethics of using and creating information.

BAD teacher ?
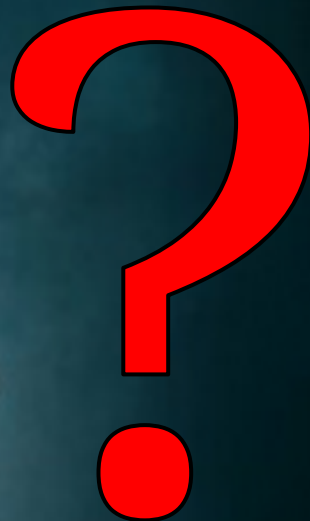
Problems with for-credit IL

- See content as dull (Kennedy, cited in Holder, 2010, p. 6)
- Don't see connection to other coursework (Ibid)
- Too few are discipline specific (Ibid)
- Freshmen don't do advanced research (Burke, 2012, p. 162)
- Prefer expediency; keep topics to research in "reserve" (Holliday & Rogers, 2013, p. 266)
- Too skill-based, isolating IL from broader contexts (Jacobs and Berg, 2011, p. 387)
- Lacking value (Valentine & Wukovitz, 2013, p. 25)

Why wasn't it successful?

Barbara Fister, citing research by Holliday and Rogers (2013), described the problem thus:

"Stop talking about 'finding sources' [and] frame the work as *learning about* something."
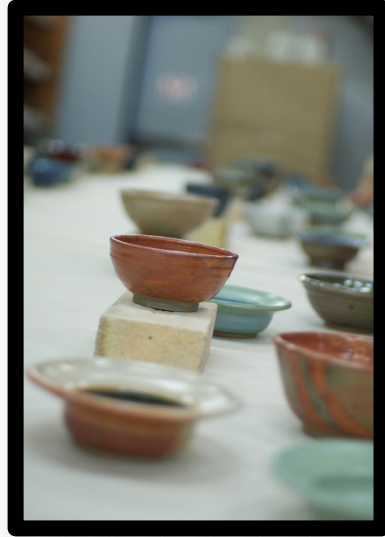
(Fister, 2013)

Solution?

- Theme-based information literacy instruction
- Natalie Tagge's article from *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (2012)
  - From the frying pan into the fire (and back again): Adventures in subject-based, credit instruction

Applied themes
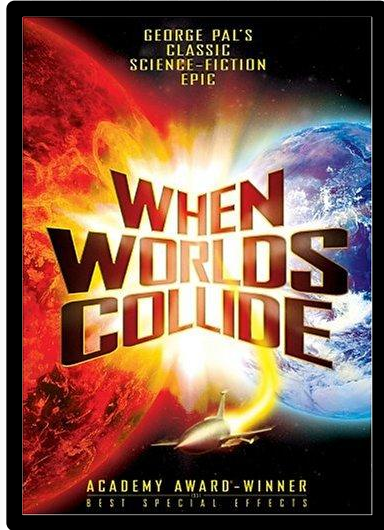
When Worlds Collide

(Greenwood & Frisbie, 1998)
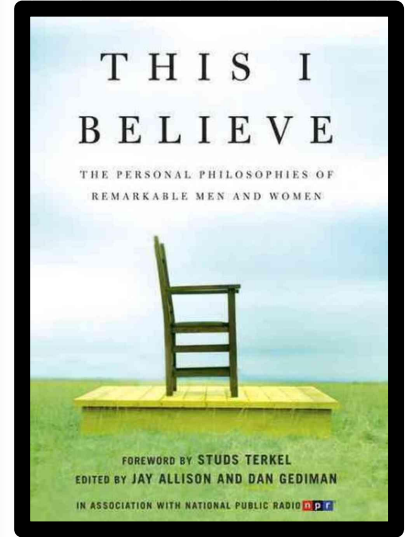
Hunger

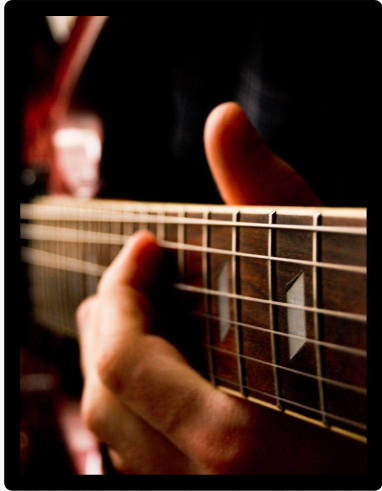(Barry, 2011)

Food

(Piper & Tag, 2011)

This I Believe

(Piper & Tag, 2011)

Applied themes

Music

(Kitts, 2013)

Zombies

(Stahura & Milanese, 2013)

The Filter Bubble
What ▮ the ▮
▮ Internet ▮
Is ▮
▮ Hiding
▮ From
▮ You ▮
Eli Pariser
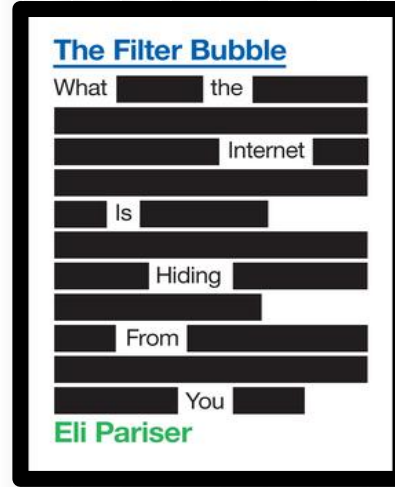
Filter bubbles

(Valentine & Wukowitz, 2013)

Personal finance

(Bergstrom & Price, 2013)

Becky's theme

Elizabeth's theme

"[The theme] improved student research tremendously. Now, projects demonstrated a thorough understanding of topic, and annotations showed us students were actually reading and comprehending the materials discovered."

(Stahura & Milanese, 2013)

Student Benefits

- Improved theses
- Ability to analyze sources for usefulness rather than summarize abstract or basic information
- Peer teaching opportunities
- Enough sources to write 5-10 page paper

Improved theses

2013 Theses based on interests

- What were the living conditions for the typical French buccaneer during the buccaneering period?

- Who are the employees working in sweatshops, what are their conditions, which U.S. companies have been discovered employing sweatshop workers, and what is the government doing about them?

2014 Theses based on theme

- In what way does privacy affect the psychological development of children?

- How are K-12 teachers in the United States transitioning to Google Drive-based instruction?

Instructor benefits

- Built knowledge by starting with background info
- Less "worksheet" answering
- More critical thinking about sources
- Better class discussions
- Easier for instructor to grade a single topic
  - And you feel less **hopeless** as an instructor
- Re-energized passion for teaching
- Opportunities in marketing course to students

Choosing a theme

- Be authentic
- Be relevant to your students
- Be broad enough to support a variety of majors and interests
- Allow for discussion and negotiation among students

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