Chapter 3
Backward Planning, Forward Motion

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the chapter is to present a holistic approach for effectively designing library and information literacy instruction applicable to any library setting. After reviewing the historical developments and implications of information literacy concepts, the three stages of backward design are explained and placed in the context of key learning theories and perspectives. Examples of the three-stage process demonstrate how the design calls on librarians to identify the desired results embodied by standards and objectives, to create authentic assessments that provide evidence of learning, and to align learning activities with the desired outcomes. Examples also highlight variations for different delivery formats, including face-to-face, flipped, and online environments. Implications for using backward design for overall, additional program planning are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Librarians are often presented with opportunities for instruction. The opportunities stem from a variety of situations, but are most often created by the need for students or patrons to become familiar with the library and its resources due to a particular assignment or information need. While librarians are well-versed in a particular subject area or information resources, they may have little or no training as a teacher or instructor. A natural tendency for new teachers or librarians is to be concerned with covering the content, rather than focusing on the actual needs of students or
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patrons. While students or patrons may be busy during an instructional session, the relevance of the instruction to goals and objectives may be clouded or nonexistent. When providing instruction, one way to remain focused is to reflect on this guiding question: “Where are we trying to get, and is this thing we are doing helping us to get there” (Holt, 1964, p. 134).

A structured approach is for librarians, both veteran and beginning, to become familiar with established instructional methodologies through relevant reading or formal coursework in order to enhance their information literacy instructional skills. For students of library science, this can be accomplished through coursework dedicated to the planning and practice of instruction while pursuing the terminal degree. For the practicing professional, though, professional development activities, such as those achieved through conferences and continued reading, need to be pursued. This chapter, then, offers the practicing professional, especially newcomers, an opportunity to sharpen instructional skills by focusing on a design framework that centers library instruction on essential concepts and transferable skills aligned with authentic assessments and meaningful learning activities.

BACKGROUND

In order to be proficient and to direct students in learning, anyone in an instructional role must have clear goals for students and an understanding of the skills necessary for student achievement (Childre, Sands, & Pope, 2009; Kelting-Gibson, 2005). It follows, then, that one must understand the concept of information literacy before being able to teach it and be aware of how it can change over time, especially with regard to the ever-changing digital landscape. An important aspect of information literacy and integral to the development of skills called for in today’s information environment is an understanding of the many definitions used for it and their evolving nature. The term, information literacy, began in the business world and is attributed to Paul Zurkowski, the 1974 president of the Information Literacy Association. In his proposal to the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, he called for a link between libraries, traditionally considered as the place for storage and retrieval of information, and information activities of the private business sector. Information literate individuals were viewed as those able to apply information resources to work-related problem solving (Behrens, 1994; Demo, 1986; Eisenberg, Lowe, & Spitzer, 2004). This view called for a set of skills beyond locating materials held at the library. During the remainder of the seventies, the definition was broadened to include locating information efficiently and effectively for decision-making and carried the weight of responsible citizenship (Behrens, 1994; Eisenberg et al., 2004).
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