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Constructing authority

Using the ACRL Framework to connect with underserved students

At the community college level, rethinking library instruction in light of the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education often feels like a puzzle. But like many things we do at the library, it all comes back to helping our most vulnerable students. In this column, we outline our library's outreach efforts to engage with two intersecting and underserved groups: returning adult students and students in the LGBTQ+ community. As job markets become more competitive, older adults are returning to community colleges in order to obtain degrees and earn credentials. As awareness and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community increases, so does the need to provide supportive services for these students. At our library, engaging with the Framework provided an opportunity to design innovative instruction and programming.

Background

Starting in the fall semester of 2018, the state of Tennessee established the TN Reconnect program to help returning adult students finish an associate's degree. In an effort to address the unique needs, experiences, and challenges of this influx of adult learners, the staff of the Kolwyck Library and Information Commons at Chattanooga State Community College explored ways to expand our regular library instruction offerings. Our ideas for modifying and enhancing information literacy instruction were shaped by critical pedagogical concepts.¹ Educator Paulo Freire's concept of students'

lived experiences shaping the learning experiences resonated with us. Returning adult students bring a multitude of experiences and intersections to the information literacy classroom and the library in general. Own-voices representation is important to LGBTQ+ scholarship. Students in this demographic are well situated to contribute their own lived experiences to queer studies.

Around this same time, we had been discussing our frustrations with implementing the Framework. Although it has been around a few years, it seemed like all of the librarians on staff felt like they simply did not have enough time to engage with something as complex as the Framework. However, we came to the consensus that we would have greater success if we chose one frame to work on. Of all the frames, one stood out: "Authority is constructed and contextual."² Authority was already one of the main topics we covered during information literacy classes, so it seemed like a perfect fit.

Connecting with adult students

We had the opportunity to work with an English faculty member who was redesigning

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ing one of her courses specifically for adult students returning to college. Since the students who would take this course would have been away from school for several years, she felt the need to craft a research assignment that took into consideration the specific needs of the adult student. Rather than a typical literary criticism essay, she wanted to relate the literature the students read to their personal interests and experience. The new assignment hinged on writing about ways students could contribute in a meaningful way to their community. The instructor wanted students to think of a societal issue important to them and research the chosen issue. This reflective assignment offered a perfect opportunity to discuss lived experiences, concepts of authority, and information literacy. It seemed like an opportune time to implement something new in the library classroom.

While planning for the class, we were aware of the unique challenges facing adult learners. One of the limitations was related to technostress—returning adult students may tell us that they are nervous about technology, but some may exhibit unease and frustration or neglect to ask questions due to embarrassment.³ We opted for a classroom where we could create a comfortable, technology-free environment, where the students would not be hidden behind computer screens. This allowed us to have a more meaningful exchange with the students as we went through the lesson. This room contains some technology but is not dominated by technology like the regular library instruction classroom. Having the class here eliminated the possibility for students to be distracted or frustrated by too much technology. We felt that the more comfortable we made the students, the greater chance they had at succeeding at Chattanooga State.

We also got the professor to agree to two library meetings, one with just Roper, and one with both of us. The plan for the first visit was simply for Roper to introduce herself and let the students know that she was there to help them specifically in the evenings and

weekends. Instead of visiting the class in their campus classroom, Roper invited the class to the library to hold their class. The goal was to get returning adult students familiar and comfortable with the library's physical environment. We recognized that many students see librarians as "intimidating," and we wanted to dispel that assumption as quickly as possible.

When Roper went to her first introductory meeting with the group, she brought homemade cookies and brewed coffee. She also created a one-page print handout with her contact information and basic information for the library. Students were surprised and pleased to learn that we are open evenings and weekends, which accommodated most of their work schedules. Roper also emphasized that answering questions and helping with research is her favorite part of her job. Prior to the meeting, she arranged chairs in a circle to encourage a casual, friendly atmosphere. The hope was that this would help alleviate some of the library anxiety that they may have been experiencing, which according to Constance Mellon, can leave students "unable to approach [their] problem logically or effectively."⁴

We began the second class by working with students on concept mapping using Ray Bradbury's story "The Veldt,"⁵ and the issue of children's use and access to technology. In the center of the map, students wrote about the issue they were interested in researching. We then workshopped different elements related to that societal issue to determine keywords. After we had our keywords, we asked for a volunteer and used an advanced Google search for research and articles related to our volunteer student's topic. A source evaluation worksheet was used to help us assess the credibility of the resources we found. We talked about authority through the lens of their own experiences. We explained that authority can be defined differently according to the context of the situation you are examining. Linking the frame Authority is Constructed and Contextual to the lived experiences of students provided a way

to draw them in and explore concepts of authority. Returning adult students are often parents, so we used the idea of parenting to explain this contextual shifting. For example, student-parents are accustomed to working with multiple layers of authority. Pediatricians, educators, personal values, beliefs, and connections all shape the ways in which one parents. Our discussion of authority, the concept mapping, and the evaluation sheet allowed us to explore as a class the importance of evaluating those sources for credibility.

One of the professor's goals was to have the students feel comfortable using the library, so we opted to assess the students' comfort level with research, both before and after the instruction session. Our initial thought was to use an app to collect the assessment data, using the students' own mobile devices. But in keeping with the low-tech nature of the class, we decided to use a paper alternative that allowed students to answer questions by holding up a card with a QR code on it. We scanned the room with an iPad to collect their responses.

At the start of the session, we passed out the QR code cards and asked the students the following question: "How comfortable do you feel with academic research?" Fifty percent of the class answered, "not very comfortable" and 50 percent answered "somewhat comfortable." At the end of the session, the students were asked, "Now how do you feel about academic research?" Fifty percent reported that they were "somewhat comfortable" with research and 50 percent said they were "very comfortable." This demonstrated that we had succeeded in creating the relaxed, yet studious, environment that was most conducive for adult learners.

Connecting with LGBTQ+ students

Our work with the Framework has extended beyond our classes to the library's outreach workshops. In October 2019, we collaborated with the Umbrella Club, Chattanooga State's LGBTQ+ club, to create an event for National Coming Out Week. We created a

hands-on workshop about memes, zines, and identity. We chose memes and zines because both are forms of media that allow members of marginalized groups to express their opinions and share their experiences. We provided paper, glue sticks, mountains of old magazines, and, most importantly, a safer space for our students to gather in community. We started the workshop by introducing ourselves and our pronouns, and we presented a brief history of memes and zines in the context of the LGBTQ+ experience. Next, we discussed The Queer Zine Archive⁶ and the importance of creating primary resources in one's own voice, as well as the importance of preservation within queer communities.

Workshop participants then created their own zine or meme reflecting topics of sexuality, gender, and/or identity. Some chose to share their creations during the workshop. Topics covered in their zines included coming out stories, discussions on the importance of pronoun etiquette, and the impact of community within their coming out experiences. The workshop was one of our most attended events of the semester, and some of the participants asked to stay longer to continue working on creating their zines and memes.

This workshop was linked to the library's wider discussion of constructing authority. For example, trans zines, interviews, and other primary sources have authority because they express the lived experiences of trans people. LGBTQ+ students often don't see themselves reflected in mainstream literature. The more we learn about the different ways that people express their gender, the more important it is to ensure that our library's efforts allow students to see themselves in what we do. A zine workshop on feminism, identity, and the riot grrrl movement was planned for Women's History Month, but it was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.


Conclusion

As we have seen, the Framework can help librarians find ways to engage with the vari-

ous constituent groups that depend on the library. It also allows us to reach out to communities of students that may not initially feel welcome or included on a college campus. Collaborating with faculty and student groups helps create programming that is deeply meaningful, whether it is an optional workshop or a required class meeting. Looking to the Framework allowed us to think outside of the regular modes we rely on and gave us an excuse to try some new things. This work is not without challenges.

Older students, having been out of academia for a while, may have more trouble conforming to more traditional forms of authority, such as college faculty. Some students may be older than the professors or librarians, which may cause tension. This is why it is important to talk about authority as being contextual. There is no “one size fits all” authority for every situation. Taking things one step, or frame, at a time, can still lead to larger changes at your institution.

Notes

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3. Brian Quinn, “Overcoming Technostress in Reference Services to Adult Learners,” *The Reference Librarian* 33, no. 69-70 (2000): 49, https://doi.org/10.1300/J120v33n69_05.
4. Constance Mellon, “Library Anxiety: A Grounded Theory and Its Development,” *College and Research Libraries* 47, no. 2 (1986): 163, <https://crl.acrl.org/index.php/crl/article/view/14195/15641>.
5. Ray Bradbury, “The Veldt,” in *Reading on the River: A Literary Anthology*, ed. Chattanooga State Community College Humanities Department (Southlake, TX: Fountainhead Press, 2017), 133.
6. “Queer Zine Archive Project,” QZAP, accessed August 5, 2020, <https://qzap.org>. 

(“What is in those compact shelves?” continued from page 489)

2. “Master_agency_list,” Google Docs, accessed February 19, 2020, <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1EsrPBRT4u3lKkbvdt7X4au4Jf9MmN-xB3nrWox-ILxs/edit#gid=1>.

3. Barbara Braxton, “Inventory: 26 Reasons for Doing One,” *Teacher Librarian* 32, no. 4 (April 2005): 52–53.

4. Martha Fallahay Loesch, “Inventory Redux: A Twenty-First Century Adaptation,” *Technical Services Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (May 19, 2011): 301–11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07317131.2011.571636>.

5. Judith M. Nixon, “The Right Book on the Right Shelf: Missing and Mismatched Books—How Bar Code Scanning Inventories Can Solve the Patrons’ Dilemma,” *Collection Management* 34, no. 4 (October 1, 2009): 276–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01462670903175221>.

6. Elizabeth Chamberlain Habich, *Moving Library Collections A Management*

Handbook (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998).

7. “Gov Info Shelf Inventory,” Google Forms, accessed February 19, 2020, <https://goo.gl/forms/8Kfus3EM1tviPOfG2>.

8. Judy T. Greenwood, “Taking It to the Stacks: An Inventory Project at the University of Mississippi Libraries,” *Journal of Access Services* 10, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 77–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15367967.2013.762266>.

9. Laura Kohl, Claire-Lise Bénéaud, and Sever Bordeianu, “Finding Shelf Space in an Academic Library: A Multifaceted Approach,” *Technical Services Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (July 3, 2017): 268–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07317131.2017.1321378>.

10. “Collection Infographic,” USU Libraries, accessed February 19, 2020, http://libguides.usu.edu/ld.php?content_id=52454401. 