Journal of Information Literacy

ISSN 1750-5968

Volume 5 Issue 1

June 2011

Book Review

Nigel Morgan. 2011. Book Review of Walsh, A. and Inala, P. (2010). *Active learning techniques for librarians: practical examples*.
Oxford: Chandos Publishing. *Journal of information literacy*, 5(1), pp 103-104
http://ojs.lboro.ac.uk/ojs/index.php/JIL/article/view/BR-V5-I1-2011-1

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Chan, L. et al 2002. *Budapest Open Access Initiative.* New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml [Retrieved 22 January 2007].

Walsh, A. and Inala, P. (2010). Active learning techniques for librarians: practical examples. Oxford: Chandos Publishing. xiv, 146pp. ISBN 9781843345923. £45.00. Pbk.

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Having attended several of Andrew Walsh's innovative and entertaining presentations at LILAC conferences, I approached this book with high expectations. The University of Huddersfield's star performer in the IL field has joined forces with Padma Inala of Manchester Metropolitan University to pool their experiences and collate many of the bright ideas which Walsh has brought to our attention over the years. This is first and foremost a practical text and the authors make it clear from the outset that it is designed to be dipped into rather than read from cover to cover. I'm delighted to say that my expectations were largely met by this approachable, readable and extremely *useful* text.

Chapter 1 provides a clear discussion of what constitutes 'active learning' in the library classroom, presenting a convincing case for structuring IL sessions around active learning techniques. Whilst our attention is drawn to the familiar learning theorists, the authors wisely do not allow the text to become weighed down by the theory. Much of this chapter describes what for many is long established practice (i.e. planning sessions around 'learning by *doing'* rather than employing passive modes). However, this is essential reading for new practitioners, and provides the theoretical and pedagogical context for the key content which follows.

Chapter 2 (which constitutes around two-thirds of the entire text) is devoted to 60 active learning tips, subdivided by category: 'starting and finishing the session', 'in the middle', 'mobile phones and other gadgets', 'Web 2.0' and 'inductions'. There is a good mixture of hi-tech and lo-tech options to suit a range of teacher confidences, experience levels and budgets. The techniques are, with hardly any exceptions, very clearly described. Each technique is presented with a description of its uses, materials required, how to use it, variations and pitfalls.

It is a real treasure trove. Anyone who is intent on adding variety and value to their IL teaching will find something inspiring and worthwhile. Old favourites such as library bingo and the Cephalonian method jostle for our attention alongside newer techniques utilising mobile technology and Web 2.0, which Walsh has championed in recent years. The range is impressive.

Many of the techniques are simple and well known such as buzz groups and poster tours. I felt that some were aimed mainly at new practitioners. However, even the most experienced teacher will stumble upon something new and unfamiliar. My favourites included the 'Stop, start, continue' method of eliciting feedback, the 'Quality or not' technique (which I look forward to using with medical students) and the innovative 'What animal are you?'. The use of modelling clay or building

blocks in some of the techniques initially struck me as bizarre, but what a great idea for visually presenting the state of one's progress or knowledge as a starting point for discussion!

You will find techniques suitable for use with learners at all levels, from primary school pupils and college students through to postgraduates. I can imagine school children being captivated by the competitive Hangman game and the 1970s inspired 'Runaround'. Distance learners are also catered for, particularly in the technology sections. The fact that the authors are aiming at a broad audience does not dilute the appeal or relevance of the book; the techniques most suited to one sector usually have elements which can be usefully applied in another.

I was particularly interested in the sections on mobile technology and Web 2.0. The ideas are imaginative and the enthusiasm of the authors is evident. In some cases, I was sceptical that the extent of preparation/setup or the potential hassle involved in getting students to utilise equipment (e.g. video and digital cameras) and podcast software was justified by the end result. I felt that some of these techniques would sit best within a series of sessions rather than in the 'one-shot' session in which time is of the essence. Nevertheless, the ideas are tempting and offer many rewards.

The crucial third and final chapter features 10 detailed lesson plans which illustrate how these techniques can be used to achieve specific learning outcomes. Again, there is something for everyone; plans range from those suitable for school sessions to those for training researchers and academics. They are well constructed (the plan for 'Current awareness made easy' is a mini master class) and all illustrate how two or more techniques from chapter 2 can be combined to create a cohesive lesson and engaging learning experience.

I enjoyed this book. Above all, this is a book I will *use*. I have some minor quibbles; many of the techniques assume that learners are co-operative and will readily engage in group activities. I have not always found this to be the case and would have liked more tips on how to deal with unresponsive students who are reluctant to work together. Also, I would have liked to have seen more humour incorporated into the text. Nevertheless, the authors have amply illustrated that with a little imagination and forethought we can all incorporate invigorating and appropriate activities into our IL sessions which will enrich the learning experience. One of the techniques described is entitled 'Creating a pot of gold'; indeed, this is precisely what the authors have produced here. Highly recommended.