Book review


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Motivating students on a time budget: pedagogical frames and lesson plans for in-person and online information literacy instruction. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries. 322pp. 978-0838989494. $64.00. Pbk.

Craig McEwan, Academic Support Librarian, University of Exeter. Email: c.mcewan@exeter.ac.uk Twitter: @CMcEwan88

Motivating students to effectively engage with information literacy instruction is a challenge that many librarians and information professionals will be familiar with. With 19 chapters and over 30 contributing authors, Motivating students on a time budget attempts to address this challenge head-on. The book aims to provide readers with real lesson plans, activities and strategies to motivate students in both classroom and online environments, particularly when contact time is limited. As well as providing practical guidance, the editors intend to offer an accessible introduction to some of the theory, models and pedagogies that readers can use to inform their practice. The goal is to demonstrate not only what is effective, but why it is effective, giving readers the theoretical context to develop successful and motivating lessons of their own.

While each chapter could successfully function as a stand-alone academic paper, they are all short, accessible reads that generally follow a similar structure. Most begin with the author(s) offering context and background on information literacy in their institution; before highlighting the key motivational theories and models that have underpinned their work. This can lead to some repetition in places, with motivational models, such as Keller's ARCS (attention, relevance, confidence, satisfaction) model, being discussed in multiple chapters. However, as the book is not intended as a cover-to-cover read, this works to its advantage; with the repetition of key concepts acting as a refresher for readers who may consult the book intermittently. When authors outline the specific approaches and activities that they have tried, they do so in considerable detail, with step-by-step break-downs of real lesson plans and example activities. Authors also consistently do well to offer suggestions of how their approach can be recreated or adapted in different scenarios (almost all chapters are published under a form of Creative Commons licence).

The impressive variety of activities, lessons and teaching approaches that the authors share with readers is one of the book’s biggest strengths. From setting learning goals (Chapter 3) and experimenting with online discussion boards (Chapter 19), to educational escape rooms (Chapter 12) and poetry writing (Chapter 13), the editors draw on the authors’ wealth of expertise to present motivational lessons and activities that cover a comprehensive range of teaching scenarios.

While each chapter offers a unique perspective, there are several recurring themes and trends that emerge throughout the book. Active learning is consistently cited as being key to engaging students with information literacy and is incorporated into several different teaching approaches. For example, Chapter 3 discusses the creation of authentic learning environments, where students are given problems and scenarios designed to mirror real-world challenges they may face post-university. This approach also utilises group work and elements of peer-support, which are frequently described as means of encouraging student motivation. Chapter 17 is a particularly strong example of this, with the authors demonstrating how creative, well-planned
group and peer learning activities can allow you to cover more content, increase student motivation and encourage deeper learning. When considering activity design, John Keller’s ARCS model of motivation is repeatedly turned to by the authors. Chapter 1 places a particular focus on the ARCS model. The author uses the model to design targeted information literacy lessons, after she conducted research to identify specific factors influencing the motivation of her students.

While some prior knowledge of educational theory may be beneficial to readers, it is by no means necessary. The authors are effective in providing clear and accessible introductions to what can initially seem like complex theoretical concepts. For example, Chapter 18 looks at the author’s use of feminist pedagogy to inform activity design. The author provides a concise introduction to feminist pedagogy, before outlining how her individual classroom activities relate to specific elements of the framework; providing readers with a clear vision of how theory can be reflected in practice.

Arguably, the book’s biggest success is its ability to motivate and inspire readers to reflect on and enhance their own teaching practice. Even activities that may initially seem more complex or challenging to implement, such as escape room tasks (Chapter 12), are explained and broken down in a manner that reassures the reader and motivates them to try something new.

Though the book’s title indicates a focus on teaching within in-person and online information literacy instruction, the authors’ attention is heavily weighted towards classroom instruction, with only two of nineteen chapters focusing on online learning environments. Given the growth of online university courses and the interest in online and blended learning in Higher Education, the book would have benefited from additional material looking at student motivation within online learning environments. It should also be noted that throughout the book, there are varying interpretations of what is meant by a ‘time-budget’. Although most chapters are successful in outlining creative, motivational activities for instructors with limited contact time, some authors’ lessons are framed as one step in a series of information literacy classes or are designed to take up more time than many instructors may expect to be afforded. However, given the number of chapters and impressive variety of content that is covered, this is in many respects a minor issue.

Whether you are an experienced information literacy instructor seeking to refresh your teaching approach, or someone who is new to teaching, looking for ways to successfully motivate and engage your students, this book will undoubtedly have something to offer. The book’s well-balanced blend of motivational and education theory, along with practical tips, lessons and activities, will leave readers motivated to try something new, and confident that they can improve the experience of their students.