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Teaching Philosophy

As an academic coach in my undergraduate studies, I mentored a student by teaching him what are often considered the basic skills to be successful in college - note-taking, studying, test-taking strategies, reading strategies, academic writing skills - to the point where he was comfortable applying those skills on his own. This student started out with very few of those skills, but he had big dreams of attending law school in the future. As we worked together over the better part of two years it was very rewarding to see him gain those basic skills and really start to thrive as a history major. He also wanted to setup a plan for what he should do in the future after I had graduated. He went on to finish his undergraduate degree and earned a master's degree in Public Health Administration. It was my positive experience coaching him that made me interested in teaching. Reflecting on that experience, I've identified three traits that I value as an instructor: structure, relevancy, and adaptability.

As an instructor, I prioritize providing structure for students by outlining clear expectations. One way to provide clear expectations is through a well-organized syllabus. This is one of the first things I look for as a student. I want a well-organized syllabus that contains assignments that have clearly laid out the expectation for the work that I need to do. I feel that this structure provides the backbone the instruction will hang on. With that said, it is my goal as an instructor to endeavor to create syllabi and assignments that have clear expectations to help students be adequately prepared to meet them ahead of time. As for providing structure during an instruction session, I use cognitive apprenticeship, a constructivist method of teaching, where a master teaches an apprentice a skill by making the thought process behind a skill explicit and allows the apprentice to practice it with immediate feedback from the master. In library instruction, I have done this through modeling a search strategy to English as Second Language students. I ask them to follow along while I demonstrate how to conduct a database search, then after I have finished modeling the search process for them, the students are given time to immediately put these skills into practice on their own topics. While they practice searching, I go around the room and check in with them individually to give them immediate feedback on their search strategies, and suggesting what they might try differently to yield more results. These exercises uncover and make explicit the structure behind conducting database searches by showing the different steps required to get to a point where they have good keywords to find relevant articles on their topics. It is my hope that by teaching them the structure of the research process, and the specific structure of keyword searching a database, will be a transferable skill that they can use for all their future research.

Relevancy is another core value that I hold as an instructor. It is important to me that the information I teach is relevant to the learning outcome I am trying to achieve as well as to my student's lives and needs. For an information literacy session, I want to make sure that my assignments meet an immediate research need, to make sure this happens, I communicate directly with their instructors to learn what the students are researching. Do they have a broad topic that the need to narrow down? Do they need to write a pro and con argument? How many types of each kind of article do they need? This allows me to tailor my instruction directly to their current information needs. Then once the students arrive at their session, I teach them how to evaluate relevancy for their chosen topic. How do the articles they are looking at connecting to the topic they have selected? I often ask them to evaluate whether the article's title seems to connect to their topic, or if the abstract makes it clear if their topic is covered in the article. I also explain that every article does not have

to be a perfect match to be relevant to the argument they are building. By tuning the materials and information presented directly into their information needs students are more likely to use and recall the information they received in the future.

In addition to structure and relevancy, I value adaptability as an integral part of my teaching philosophy. To me, adaptability means being able to adapt to the needs of your students whether it is incorporating different learning styles into your lessons, re-assessing deadlines, re-assessing your style of instruction, or recovering from malfunctioning technology during a session. Adaptability is also a state of mind that I try to teach students by example. I want them to leave my instruction sessions feeling as though they have skills to be adaptable. One way of demonstrating this in literacy instruction is to use keyword searches that I start with a general search with basic keywords and then teach them how to adapt that search by showing them how to generate better keywords to search with. For example, pointing out that they can start with a general search, but then use subject headings to adapt their search to the language the database use can generate better search results. This gives them strategies to adapt their searches to get relevant results for their research. My hope is that the ability to adapt searches will transfer over into the student's other skills as they work hard at university and beyond into their lives.

In summary, I believe that it is important to try to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom and that is possible to do so by adhering to the core values that I have identified in this teaching philosophy.