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Book Review: Transforming information literacy instruction using learner-centered teaching

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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].

Kaplowitz, J. R. 2012. *Transforming information literacy instruction using learner-centered teaching*. London: Facet. 254pp. ISBN. 978-1-85604-835-4. £49.95.

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Joan Kaplowitz is well known for her advocacy for information literacy (IL) and her leadership in her former role as head of research, instruction and collection services at the Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library, University of California, Los Angeles. Her education and experience as a teacher of library instruction and credit bearing courses in UCLA's library and information science programme provides her with unique insight and access to teaching pedagogies used in academic environments. Her newest monograph, *Transforming information literacy instruction using learner-centered teaching*, is a seminal work which provides solid and robust ideas for transforming the roles of librarians who teach the principles of IL in academic, special and public libraries.

Let the main object of this, our didactic, be as follows: To seek and to find a method of instruction, by which teachers may teach less, but learners may learn more.

Comenius, *The Great Didactic*, 1649

This quote from the foreword of Kaplowitz's book describes the author's notions that instructors need to teach less and in turn allow learners, academic and otherwise, to learn and experience more. This shift to learner-centred teaching (LCT) is evident in many monographs within the field of education, and now Kaplowitz provides an easy to read and comprehensive introduction for libraries. Her clear and concise explanation of the origins of LCT allows readers, primarily librarians not familiar with educational psychology, to gain insight into its history and principles and ultimately see its application as a teaching method for IL.

Broken into four parts and with chapters that cover how to recognise LCT, planning, assessment, and a summation, Kaplowitz does an excellent job of deconstructing and reconstructing the varying traditional and learner-centred approaches utilised in teaching along with implications for IL instruction. With the unique perspective of a librarian who has taught one-off, curriculum based, face-to-face, blended, and online learning modules, she brings to light our need to exchange the strict and rigid regimen that many librarians employ in their teaching for one that allows for flexibility and focuses on the learner as they "achieve expected learning outcomes". Simply stated, letting them (our learners) drive the bus. By constantly reminding us that they are the centre and focus of instruction, Kaplowitz drives home the point that learners need to "interact with the material", use critical thinking skills and ultimately select appropriate resources for research and information needs.

Beginning with a description of LCT and a brief historical background of educational psychology, Kaplowitz lays the foundation for engaging learners in ways that grant them the ability or impetus to assume responsibility for their individual learning, arguing that recipients of IL instruction delivered through LCT better recognise the usefulness of their skills as they are applied to general research, decision-making and lifelong learning. This leads to the major strength of the book which is the application of LCT in face-to-face, blended and online environments. Following a brief discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of LCT and traditional pedagogies, Dr. Kaplowitz provides detailed descriptions and suggestions for initiating, restructuring and implementing learner-centred teaching. She reveals how the overall benefits of LCT enhance the dynamics of library instruction through a series of developmental stages: attention-getting activities; delivery of planned content; and the Big Finish. In addition, Kaplowitz's inclusion of a case study and numerous vignettes that utilise LCT exemplify the usefulness of this practical method of teaching and serve as examples for practice.

“Regardless of format, using LCT principles means we need to decide how we will listen, engage, and inspire our learners...Furthermore, we need to think about how to work within that setting to create an atmosphere of collaboration, participation, and responsibility.” (p.129)

Initially, LCT may make instructors uncomfortable because of its fluid nature, but the drive to achieve successful instruction interactions is of the utmost importance. The examples of diverse learners of IL as demonstrated in the vignettes provide compelling synopses of personal experiences using LCT in a variety of libraries and settings. Kaplowitz’s experience as an instructor and author shines through. Though there are no overt weaknesses in the book, some may think the coverage of assessment a bit light given the substantial amount of time spent on the background of LCT. In addition, it would have been interesting to tie in the suggested assessment tools directly with the detailed vignettes.

Overall, the easy to understand and rich nature of what the author has to share makes this particular work a must-read for library instructors who seek to improve their personal teaching pedagogy and, more importantly, the IL skills of their learners.