

Transforming Research into Practice

by Ruth V. Small

In her research, Carol Kuhlthau discovered that students not only demonstrate patterns in their learning of research skills but also demonstrate patterns in their motivation as they progress through the research process. For example, she found that students become anxious and overwhelmed at the very beginning of the process when they must choose a research topic and experience the frustration and anxiety of information overload when their information search presents them with mountains of information.

In my own research, I have sought to discover what librarians did, motivationally speaking, when they taught information literacy skills to their students, using John Keller's ARCS (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction) Model as a framework for analyzing what we observed. Somewhat surprisingly, at both the K-12 and college level, the data revealed that librarians overwhelmingly used teaching strategies that gain and maintain student attention and interest but did little to (1) make the learning relevant, (2) build student confidence in their ability to learn and use information skills, and (3) help students feel a sense of accomplishment with their learning success. It is essential that we address all four of the ARCS components in our information literacy skills instruction if we want to motivate our students to learn and develop a love of learning.

As librarians, we need to work with classroom teachers and college faculty to find ways to help students become more intrinsically motivated to learn. We can do this by providing challenging learning experiences that promote feelings of competence and mastery. It is the intrinsically motivated student that becomes a lifelong learner.

Therefore, let's look at some teaching strategies that librarians at all levels might use to motivate their students that address these three areas.

Making Learning Relevant

- At the very beginning of the lesson or unit, describe ways in which what will be learned builds on their current knowledge and skills and how it will benefit them in a current or future endeavor.
- Use examples from the students' experiences.
- Provide students with choices about which methods they might use to pursue their learning (e.g., using print or online resources) or how they present the results of their learning (e.g., PowerPoint presentation, research paper).

Building Student Confidence

- Develop a rubric (or have students develop one) for assessing student learning and share it with students at the very beginning of the learning process so that students know what to expect and understand how their performance will be evaluated.
- When teaching a skill (e.g., database searching), provide many opportunities for students to practice this skill and offer feedback that supports their effort and learning progress.
- Provide more time and support for learning to students who need it.

Feeling a Sense of Accomplishment

- Show students how to apply their new learning to a current assignment or class activity.
- Showcase students' exemplary work (e.g., in a display for Parents' Night).
- Assess student work according to previously established criteria (e.g., rubric).

If you would like to learn more about this topic, you might want to read:

Jere Brophy, "Synthesis of Research on Strategies for Motivating Students to Learn," *Educational Leadership* 45 (October 1987): 40-48.

John M. Keller, "Strategies That Stimulate the Motivation to Learn," *Performance and Instruction* 26 (October 1987): 1-8.

Carol C. Kuhlthau, "Information Search Process: A Summary of Research and Implications for School Library Media Programs," *School Library Media Quarterly* 18 (Fall 1989): 19-25.

Ruth V. Small, "An Exploratory Study of Motivational Strategies in Library and Information Skills Instruction." *School Library Media Research*. <http://www.ala.org/aasl/SLMR/index.html> (January 1999).

Ruth V. Small, R.V., Nasriah Zakaria, N. and Houria El-Figuigui. "Motivational aspects of information literacy skills instruction in community college libraries." *College & Research Libraries*, (March 2004). vol. 65, no. 2) 96-122.

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