Teaching information literacy: A conceptual approach

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TEACHING INFORMATION LITERACY: A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH. Gavin, Christy. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008, vi+229 pp., $45.00, ISBN 0-8108-5202-0.

Discussions of information literacy have too often remained at the theoretical level with less practical guidance on how to teach concepts and to develop critical thinking skills. Gavin's book adds to the information literacy discussion by providing concrete strategies for teaching information-seeking and critical thinking skills within instruction sessions. As the coordinator of Instructional Services at California State University, Bakersfield, she brings welcome practical experience and advice.

Underlying the book's organization is a concept-based approach to instruction that emphasizes the development of a student's critical thinking skills. For Gavin, the goal of the instructor librarian is to teach students the basic and advanced skills that would enable them to navigate the research process from a conceptual perspective. She delineates the stages within a conceptual approach to research—recognizing a research problem, formulating questions, retrieving information, analyzing information, and integrating knowledge—and contrasts this with the simple gathering of facts.

The chapters are arranged sequentially to mirror the process students would follow in conducting their research. Each chapter tackles a major concept, from topic narrowing to source evaluation, and provides both a discussion of the topic and the reasons for teaching it, as well as suggested classroom activities. The first section of each chapter provides goals and objectives for the lesson and gives a concise discussion of each objective. These discussions set the foundations for the classroom activities at the end of each chapter and could serve as sources for lecture material.

Most notably, at the end of each chapter, Gavin provides suggestions for classroom activities both for instructors doing one-shot sessions and those with multiple class sessions or semester-long courses. In addition to providing descriptions of possible activities, she also proffers concrete examples of those activities in action. Some of the examples are more successful than others, but overall they provide guidance for thinking about the activities that realistically could be completed within a session's time constraints.

One difficulty with her approach is that, although she differentiates between types of instruction sessions (one shot versus semester-long courses), she does not distinguish between students with differing levels of ability and prior knowledge. It would have been helpful if Gavin had delineated beginning and advanced concepts more clearly, especially in her later chapters. For example, in her chapter on Online Public Access Catalogs (OPAC), her discussion of Library of Congress Subject Headings is quite extensive. While she provides suggestions for a one-shot session covering the OPAC, her learning objectives are not geared to the specific

knowledge levels of participating students. An instructor could extract the most relevant pieces to cover in a particular class, but I would have liked a more substantial discussion of matching student knowledge with the content being delivered.

Librarian instructors and Library and Information Studies graduate students interested in instruction and information literacy would benefit from reading this work. For students of information literacy, this book is an excellent companion to Grassian and Kaplowitz's *Information Literacy Instruction: Theory and Practice*. Gavin's work expands on the practical advice for conducting instruction that is also offered in Grassian and Kaplowitz. In addition, instructors of composition and freshmen level courses would benefit from the techniques and approaches in this work, especially in the early chapters on topic and thesis statement development. Gavin's book would be an excellent addition to most academic libraries, especially those with active library instruction and information literacy programs.

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