



Book Review

Review of *Practical Academic Library Instruction: Learner-Centered Techniques*

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ABSTRACT

Review of Oehrli, J. A. (2022). *Practical academic library instruction: Learner-centered techniques*. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions.

KEYWORDS

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Teaching library instruction sessions and instilling information literacy concepts comes with its own unique set of challenges. From the good to the bad, many experiences are shared or learned over time. In *Practical Academic Library Instruction*, Jo Angela Oehrli writes from years of experience teaching in K-12 institutions and academic libraries. One common theme rings throughout this book: the author clearly enjoys teaching and sharing practical wisdom with others in the profession, regardless of how many years of experience they may have with teaching classes.

The book is organized into sections that break down the entire process of providing library instruction. Within each section are chapters that focus on the title of the section. The organization of sections and chapters are linear in terms of how many of us approach library instruction. The initial sections focus on the why we teach what we do. The middle sections focus on preparing for and what happens during class. The last section is on closing out the class and what may come next.

Many of the chapters are rooted in concepts and theories that the author illustrates with prior knowledge and experiences. When reading the book, there were many instances where the author describes situations that would relate or connect with many of us in the academic library profession giving it more practical application.

In the initial section, entitled “The Basics,” Oehrli addresses why we enjoy what we do for library instruction. The author describes motivating factors and levels of engagement that allow us to reach students of various levels. The main takeaway of this section is that teaching is not telling, but more about creating a sense of engagement and a desire to learn.

The next section, “The Starting Point of Class,” is broken down into chapters that cover the process of preparing for class, starting with when students arrive at the classroom, and getting started. In chapter three, “Preparing for Class,” the author links preparing for a class to the analogy of building a house and needing an architecture plan before building. The author highlights how backwards design can be beneficial in this process. Backwards design is just one of many practical tools and resources the author provides throughout the book.

The third section, “Middle of Class,” contains chapters that place the reader in the classroom and focuses on the ever-changing classroom dynamics that library instructors face. This section is grounded with building scenarios that give the reader simple examples of how to connect to students in the classroom. For example, chapter five creates an image of a map and that the entire class has one common destination. However, because of individual prior library or research knowledge, each student may be at a different starting point on the map. Knowing that they end up at one destination provides the common ground for the learning environment.

In chapter six, “Thinking About Thinking,” the author focuses on metacognition and its importance during library instruction. Techniques such as KWL (know, want to know, and learned) are discussed along with formative assessment (p. 54, 57). Later in chapter nine,

which covers instructional dilemmas, the author discusses what many of us have experienced. For example, students looking at the clock, distractions, needing to pace your content since your class time has been shortened, etc. In all, this section really drives home the need to think and adjust for each class's unique set of variables. We are not simply taking out a script and reading the same thing over and over for each class. Rather, we as teachers need to adjust based on the classroom dynamics we face.

The final section, "Looking Back and Forward on Your Library Instruction," contains chapters focused on the conclusion of the class and possible assessment. Reflection is strongly highlighted and allows us to analyze what worked and what did not (p. 101). The teaching experience should not just address whether we connected with students or what they may have learned but should also address what we as teachers learned and what could be changed in the future to better reach and engage with students.

In summary, the book was written by an individual who really enjoys what they do and values library instruction and the ability to connect and help students learn. The author writes from years of experience, but at the same time, promotes the importance of professional development and learning about new approaches and techniques, many of which are highlighted throughout the book. The index allows for the quick referencing of practices or approaches.

The organization of the book and how it is presented is done in a very pragmatic way. It ties back to situations many of us have experienced and covers varying experience levels. From someone beginning in the profession, to someone who may have been teaching for decades, there are takeaways for us all. Recommended for anyone working in library instruction that endeavors to learn something new that will benefit both the librarian and the students with whom they engage.