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This is an author's accepted manuscript of an article to be published in ALISS Quarterly, vol. 11 (4). The final definitive version will be available online at:

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Interactive Learning in Library Inductions at University for the Creative Arts

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University for the Creative Arts is a multi-site arts university with 4 sites in Kent and Surrey. Enrolment is around 6,500 students. Degrees awarded are BA (hons), MA, PhD, as well as PGCE and FE level. Subjects taught include Fine Art, Photography, Journalism, Fashion, Film, Graphic Design, and others.

The Activity

Large group library inductions in a lecture theatre at the beginning of term are often considered to be one of the more challenging scenarios for delivery (Verlander and Scutt 2009). This is the case in terms of making the content memorable and also with finding ways to engage students. At University for the Creative Arts, where I held the post of Learning and Teaching Librarian until December 2014, our department encompassed Library support jointly with academic skills support. The Librarians presented inductions jointly and collaboratively with Learning Development Tutors, who are responsible for supporting students with reading, writing and critical skills. Together we designed an induction in which students in groups of 30-90 were introduced to the library and its resources, using an activity designed to engage them and elicit their participation, connecting their ideas with the content presented.

In this activity, students are split into two large groups. They are not necessarily moved but an imaginary line can be drawn in the middle of the room. Post-it notes are distributed to students - each of the two groups is given a different colour Post-it note. One group is instructed to write down on their Post-it note any positive past experience doing research, from any point in their lives. The second group is instructed to write down any negative past experience doing research. As students individually begin to write their experiences on Post-it notes, they are encouraged to discuss the topic with peers who are sitting nearby.

Discuss past research experience



Group 1

**Describe a good
research experience**
What was it?
**What made it a good
experience?**

**On your post-it write
1 thing that makes
research good**

Group 2

**Describe a bad
research experience**
What was it?
**What made it
difficult?**

**On your post-it write
1 thing that makes
research difficult**

Fig. 1 Powerpoint slide with instructions for students

During the exercise, the Librarian and/or Learning Development Tutor moves through the room to chat with students and encourage those who are not participating or who might need help. As students complete their writing, Post-it notes are collected. The exercise should take no more than ten minutes in total.

As the notes are collected, a second Librarian or Learning Development Tutor, stationed at the front of the room, begins to post the completed notes on easels or the wall - one easel or area for "good experiences" and a second area for "bad experiences". If there is time, the notes can be grouped into common themes.

Next the Librarian reads the Post-its aloud (depending on the size of the group, this might be done by two or three people) and reports back what has been shared, addressing commonalities and themes which have been raised. Very often there are several notes which state the same experience, but may be worded differently. Students tend to be engaged during the reporting back of the notes, as they have a stake in the content, having made a contribution to what they are hearing. They are keen to hear their own statements presented in the context of the exercise, as well as what others have contributed.

Common examples which have emerged from executing this exercise include:

Good research experiences:

- I searched library catalogue and found books I needed
- I found a book easily by searching the online catalogue
- I found interview subjects by asking my tutor
- Looking for someone with no online presence, asked someone for her email address and found her

Bad research experiences:

- Books were all checked out
- Not enough books in the library
- I can't find what I need
- I don't like reading

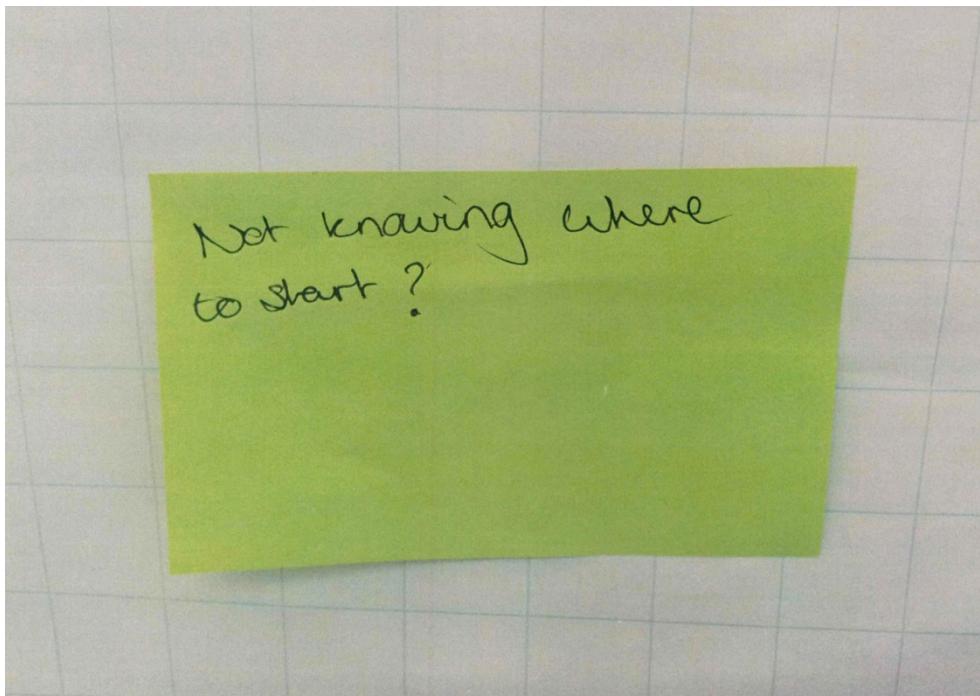


Fig 2. Example of a student's "bad research experience"

The activity serves as a lead-in to a Powerpoint presentation and live demonstration of library resources. Students' written comments from the Post-it note exercise are woven into the content of the talk, including how the library and its resources can address any problems and needs which have been raised. The Librarian doing the presentation must be willing to improvise enough to include these comments. Students' contributions and ideas are linked to the Librarian's presentation, creating a more effective and engaging session overall.

Learning Theories

This activity encompasses the work of a number of educational theorists. Firstly, Black and Wiliams' method of "formative assessment" is used (Black et al. 2004). An assessment, according to this definition, is an activity carried out by teachers and experienced by students where information is exchanged in the classroom and can be used as feedback to modify the learning experience. It is an entirely different method of meeting students' needs than the traditional linear lecture method of teaching. The key element is to design and plan classroom activities to give students the opportunity to express their thinking and then provide feedback to help develop it, and to be sure that students are active participants in the lessons. In our library activity, we presented a question with no "right" answer, eliciting personal responses from students; we then formulated a way to provide feedback to students to connect their experiences to the content of the lesson, i.e. a library orientation.

Using a formative assessment model involves changing the classroom from an environment where students are passive recipients of knowledge offered by the teacher to one where they are active learners who take responsibility for their own learning. Using this model requires a degree of risk on the part of the teacher and the willingness to relinquish control in

the classroom. The benefits are the positive outcomes of sharing the responsibility with students.

Another theory we make reference to is Bloom's taxonomy of learning domains (Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia 1973). Bloom outlines three areas of focus for educational design: the cognitive, the psychomotor and the affective domains. For our interactive induction activity, the affective realm is addressed as it deals with the students' emotional realm, including motivations, attitudes, and feelings. A student's reaction to an experience in the classroom, ranging from simple acceptance to a more firm commitment, and whether they will feel fully engaged, based on their values, is embodied by Bloom's affective domain. The library activity enables students to choose something from their own experience, reflect and discuss with peers, capitalising on this idea.

In Paolo Freire and Ira Shor's influential, philosophically based "dialogical" method of teaching, we again see a model where knowledge is not the sole possession of the teacher (Shor and Freire 1987). Teachers and students work together in a democratic way involving "dialogues", reflecting on their respective realities as they make and remake them together. Insofar as we are all "communicative beings who communicate to each other as we become more able to transform our reality" we are able to know what we know, Freire says, and then act critically. The classroom becomes a kind of laboratory for transformation in this model, where the teacher brings forth material, or so-called "objects to be known", and along with the students it is put on a metaphorical table between the two subjects of knowing. They meet around it and through it for mutual inquiry.

In our library induction exercise, the "dialogue" begins with the librarian and tutor making reference to past research experience, which is the object. The students then bring forth their ideas in a social exercise, in discussion with each other, creating the first level of social transformation. The dialogue between the students seals the relationship between the subjects who "know and try to know" further. Later, when the ideas generated by the students are presented and discussed in the session, particularly in the context of the repurposed library content, the students have shaped the meaning of the session. This creates a further level of transformation. A final point in this model stresses relearning on the part of the teacher through dialogue, demonstrating further the transformative process and showing another advantage of the democratic processes of the dialogic method.

Lastly, Kolb's 'cycle of learning' theory includes immediate or concrete experiences as a basis for learning (Kolb 2014), and Neil Mercer's work around "classroom talk" addresses the construction of shared meaning through talk and discussion (Mercer 2010). These theories are also embodied in the interactive induction where the session is designed to elicit ideas from students and then reused in the Librarian's presentation.

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Thank you to my colleague, Nicola Whittingham, Learning Development Tutor at University for the Creative Arts.