

Final Design Project: Ulysses **Benjamin Oberdick**

Case Summary

Ulysses is a first-year student taking his required introductory writing class from the Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures (WRAC) Department. He has chosen to take WRA 150 “Introduction to American Thought” which is designed to give students an introduction to using inquiry in the research process. Students in this class must complete five papers during the semester ranging from an autobiography that requires no research to a large research paper where they’re expected to find various kinds of scholarly sources to help them answer their research question. The instructors for these classes, who range from graduate students to full professors, are able to choose to bring their classes to the library for a library instruction class.

Ulysses’ teacher, a graduate student, realizes the importance of taking her students to the library for an instruction session on how to locate, evaluate, analyze and use information so she has scheduled a class with a librarian. She will bring her students to the library right after they’ve been given their third assignment, which is the first assignment that requires students to do a bit of research. The goal of my class is to help students become familiar with the library, our resources and to understand how to begin the resource process.

Ulysses is an expert researcher and “information-finder” in his own mind because he is very familiar with Google and finding information via the web. Ulysses has always succeeded in his classes, received good grades and completed assignments by using Wikipedia and other web sites that he is familiar with. Ulysses doesn’t really use the library to do his work although he is not opposed or adverse to it; he’d just rather use the “easy” online resources he’s used to, and

comfortable with. In addition to the convenience of finding information on his own, the library at his university is huge and a bit confusing so he would rather just do his research at Biggby or in his dorm room.

Ulysses is required to come to the library instruction session for his WRAC 150 class since his teacher will be there, and attendance will be taken, but he doesn't really want to go. In class he is polite and semi-attentive even though he doesn't really want to be there and doesn't really understand why he needs to use the resources being discussed. He listens to the instructor and answers questions occasionally, but he's definitely not putting forth a lot of effort. He has multiple windows open on his computer so he can stay in contact with friends via email and Facebook while simultaneously going to the different library resources and tools the librarian is talking about and/or demonstrating. He pays nominal attention in class, while trying not to fall asleep or appear too bored. His attention wanes because he knows that when he sits down at his laptop to do research for his paper, he will go right to Wikipedia and/or Google to find the information he needs because he already knows how to search, and use, these tools and is comfortable with them.

While in class, he often gets texts from his friends and he responds to them when they arrive because even though he wouldn't do this in his "normal" class, he feels that it's okay to do it during his library class because it doesn't really matter; it's something extra that he has to come to, but it's not really part of his WRAC class or important to his studies or grades. When he's not staring blankly at the teacher, looking at Facebook or his email, texting or trying to stay awake, he may be found quietly whispering to his neighbor who just found a cool web site or has an interesting picture on his computer to share. At the end of the class he hurries to log off

the computer and exit the class, possibly stopping for a second on the way out to thank the librarian for the information he will probably never use.

Motivational Assessment

My library instruction/information literacy classes are one-shot sessions given to first-year students who are taking a class in the Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures (WRAC) department as part of the Tier-One Writing Program. The classes are given in one of three instruction rooms at the MSU Main Library. These instruction rooms have an instructor computer and projector which shows the whole class whatever is on the teacher's screen. The students also have their own computers which have been purposefully set-up to give them full access to the WWW instead of restricted access, which we can do, to only library resources. I provide full web access because the activities I do in class require students to conduct searches and find resources outside the library. The downside is that the students feel entitled and free to use the computers to look at whatever they like.

I do a host of activities with the first-year students in the library instruction classes. The classes are generally one-hour and fifty minutes in length and I start each class with a 15 minute tour of the library to get them familiar with the building and to point out some of the important locations of various services we provide. After we get to the classroom, and the students have logged into their computer, I show the students a video or have them read a short article. I use this to spark their interest, to get the discussion going and to give them something to react to. We discuss the video or article and form a research question from it. Then we work together to generate some keywords from the research question. I then split the class into 5 groups (Background source, Article, Book, Opinion and Web Site) and give them 3-5

minutes to find a resource for their category of information. I tell the students to search wherever they would normally search when they're doing research. After they find a resource we come back together and I ask for a volunteer from the first group (Background source). The volunteer comes up to my computer and shows us what he/she has found. We discuss the resource, usually Wikipedia, and evaluate how we could use it for our research. Afterwards I show the students a parallel library resource that they could use to find that type of information, but from a more reliable source. I do this same sequence with the other 4 groups. There are also some additional activities I do with certain groups. For the article group, I do a clicker activity to talk about the differences/similarities between scholarly journals and popular magazines. I also have a clicker activity for primary versus secondary sources that I do if it pertains to the class assignment the students will be doing. For the book group, after we discuss the library catalog and do some searches I have the students actually find a book in the library catalog and then go out into the library and get it. The students get about 20 minutes to do this and generally have time to take a break as well. We end the class by looking at a course guide I've created for them that has links to all the resources I've shown them plus a few more. The students complete a short 3 question poll on the guide and I ask for any questions they may have.

Motivational problem

The biggest problem I observe in Ulysses, and others, is that while they appear to be "listening" to me and answering the questions I ask, many of them are not really putting forth a lot of effort. They generally have multiple windows open on their computers so they can stay in contact with friends via email and Facebook while simultaneously going to the different library

resources and tools I am talking about and/or demonstrating. I feel like Ulysses pays nominal attention in class, but that he isn't actively participating or learning; it can be like pulling teeth to get him to contribute anything to the class. I want my sessions to be as useful and helpful as possible, and I do a lot of active learning and hands-on activities in class, but Ulysses and others still often seem disinterested and/or bored. One reason for this, in my opinion, is that some students may have already determined and decided that when they sit down at their laptop to do research for their paper, they will go right to Wikipedia and Google to find the information they need; they already know how to search and use these tools, and are comfortable with them, so that is where they will go when they finally sit down to do their research.

I also think that many students do not see the connection I'm making between what I'm showing them in class and what they'll be expected to do for their own assignment, even though I am basing the class and the activities we're doing directly on their assignment. I think it can be difficult for them to connect what I'm showing them and what they'll have to do on their own later.

I think many of the **preconditions** are met partially or in full in my classroom. I have as supportive an environment that is conducive to learning as I can, given the limitations of only meeting with the students once for one or two hours. The instruction rooms are well-lit, fairly comfortable although a bit warm during the cold months, and each student has access to the WWW so they are not restricted or limited in any way. I may give the students too much freedom in regard to their open access to the internet, but since it is necessary for the activities in class and a core belief for me as a librarian, I am not willing to compromise on restricting their access. I always try to show the students I care and am interested in them, because I am,

but again the time restriction makes it hard to build a lot of trust or routine into the class since I will only work with them once. I tell them repeatedly that we, the library, are here to help and that they can and should come to use whenever they have questions or need help with their research.

I target the class to a middle difficulty level so that everyone in the class can hopefully succeed with the activities. I must have the class planned and structured before the students come to class because I will only be able to meet with them once for an hour or two so I don't really have time to do a lot of assessment at the beginning of class that would help me tailor the class to their specific needs. I always try to tie the class as a whole, and specifically the activities we do and the resources we look at, to their assignment so that they can find a link and reason for why we're doing what we're doing. I have to treat the class as a whole instead of the students individually because we don't have the time together to develop an individual plan, or to meet the individual needs, of each student.

I am continually and constantly monitoring the students to see if they appear to understand what we're doing; my biggest method of doing so is through observation. I also use clicker quizzes, for certain topics/subjects, to monitor if the students are "getting it." Their answers to these questions allow me to see if I need to reteach a topic or if we can move on. I also use the poll feature in the course guide I make for each class I do to ask the students 3 questions at the end of class. Their answers allow me to assess the class a bit and see if they need more information about a topic. I ask the students constantly if they have any questions and let them know that they can email or call me with any questions in the future.

I teach in an inquiry-based, active learning environment that ties the information, tools and resources we cover to the student's research. I try to teach this material in a meaningful way that shows its' value and importance, but it's a BIG struggle. I have to fight students' natural inclination and belief that they already know how to search, find "good" information and evaluate the information they find. I tie the material I cover to their specific assignment and their class to show its' relevance, but it's hard to overcome the searching overconfidence most students feel.

I have taught in one form or another for a long time and I am very comfortable doing so. I have taught information literacy/library instruction classes for over 3 years now between my previous job and my current one and I am very comfortable and confident in my subject knowledge and expertise.

Motivational Assessment using TARGET MODEL

The Tasks I ask students to complete in my class range from finding a specific type of resource anywhere they normally would via the web, to completing clicker questions, to discussing the ways they evaluate an online resource. Many of the activities are done independently, but when students work in small groups they are all working on the same task at the same time and then coming back to discuss what they've found. The tasks are not extremely challenging for the students because generally they are being asked to do something they already often do. I introduce some new tools, resources and ways of finding, evaluating, and effectively using information, but when I have the students doing independent or group activities they are doing something they are very familiar with in a safe, nonjudgmental environment. I try to always relate the topic we do in class to something that they would do for

their actual paper and I give the students some input on the topic we'll be doing. They come up with the question that we'll be investigating and also the keywords we'll be using to discover the information and resources. I show the class an article, video or picture at the beginning of class for them to react to, and then together we come up with a question or topic to answer with our classroom research. This gives the student some input and buy-in to what we're doing in the class and hopefully makes it more enjoyable.

Students are not treated as individually as I'd like them to be in my class. I meet with my students once for an hour or 2 and don't see them beforehand. The activities in my class are meant for the whole class and the whole class does them. I can't do individual activities with the students or individualize my instruction because of time and other restraints.

The students are pretty much all working on the same task at the same time so there isn't a lot of variety of tasks going on at the same time. The clickers I use in class are anonymous so the students can answer the questions truthfully without fear of embarrassment.

In terms of Authority, the class format is already decided beforehand by me although I can adjust it when needed and make minor changes on the fly. The students do have some choice on the topic although only a modicum. I plan the video or article we start the class with based on the class assignment, but the students are the ones that come up with the research question and keywords we use for our searches. Also, the resources we evaluate for the first part of each group are based on what that group and volunteer have found because we use their example.

Student input into the learning activities is not done since the class only meets once. I have to have everything ready to go for the class before they arrive. I ask for student input and

insight into what we're doing constantly. I also encourage students to pursue their own unique interests in their subsequent research.

In terms of Recognition, I tell students "good job" or thank them publically often during class. Most of the other assessment is done anonymously so I never really know who's answering correctly or incorrectly and therefore can't single out individual students. When I do an activity that has the students go out into the library to find a book, I often discuss what they've found as they bring their book back. I'll often give students a lot of encouragement here and praise those that have found a book as well as those who may not have, but who've tried.

I Group my students mainly through one short group activity I have, which students don't actually have to work in a group to do, allows students to work together in a noncompetitive way. They're working together to find a book, article, web site or whatever and are not graded or assessed on what they find. I'd like to incorporate more group/collaborative work into the class because I think many students would enjoy it and learn from it.

The students and I work together toward the goal of finding information for their research, but I don't think I fully articulate the learning goals we're working toward. The activities are designed to get them familiar with using library resources and helping them complete the research for their papers, but the higher purposes of what we're doing may be hidden or generally unknown to the students.

The Evaluation of learners in my classroom is minimal. Students can only demonstrate what they know by answering questions or volunteering to come up front to show the resource they've found. I reteach topics/subjects, if time permits, when I notice that students aren't

“getting it.” This is often hard to do because of the short class time we have, but I will try to do it when necessary.

One of the biggest areas of difficulty, for me, is with Time. My classes are set for a fixed amount of time and filled with a lot to teach so I don’t usually have additional time I can give students to do things. I always tell students that if they have additional questions or things they want me to go over they can call or email me anytime to schedule a one-on-one session. I also reiterate the many ways they can get help from/at the library.

Proposed Motivational Intervention

In order to get Ulysses more motivated to learn about how to conduct research and ultimately become an information literate person, I need to address his lack of connection with the class and the material, his idea that what he is learning in class is not useful, helpful or important for him to know and his efficacy that he has the ability to use the “complicated” library resources instead of the ones he is used to and comfortable with. I have to show Ulysses that what he is learning will help him in his actual research projects and that he will have a better chance at success if he uses the methods, tools and resources I am showing him. I will use the TARGET framework to demonstrate my plan and show how I plan to modify my approach and what I do.

I need to change my approach in relation to Task by further connecting the work we do in the library instruction class to the students’ own research and to the real-world. Ulysses feels a disconnect between what I’m showing and doing in class and what he needs to do for his assignment. I’d like to address this by meeting with the class instructor before the instruction session to see if we can work on the design of the research assignment and work to better tie

what I'm doing in class to the student's assignment; students are often more motivated when tasks are linked to their interests so working more closely with the class instructor will hopefully allow me to improve what I'm doing in class (Stipek, 2002, p. 181). If Ulysses understood the real-world significance of what I'm showing and demonstrating in class, he would hopefully begin to understand why I'm doing what I'm doing also why it's important. Ulysses struggles with applying the material he learns in the class to his own research and tends to fall back into the "bad habits" he's developed of relying on Wikipedia and other online resources. I think that if I can purposely connect the material that is taught to Ulysses and his classmates to practical real-life experiences it would allow them to make connections to what they are learning and how they can use it because to help increase intrinsic motivation, instructors should "explain the demands and purposes of tasks and the real-world significance of the skills they are designed to teach" (Stipek, 2002, p. 174).

I plan to modify my approach in terms of Authority by providing students with more choices during class because "a feeling of personal control and self-determination is a basic human need" (Stipek, 2002, p. 187). Students have some choice and control in my class, but it is limited. I come to class with a plan of what I'm going to show them and what the general topic will be, but in order for students to feel more control, autonomy and self-determination I think I need to let them "drive" the class more. Having them drive more will increase their motivation because "students are most motivated when they are given choices and have some control over their academic work" (Stipek, 2002, p. 187). I think I can give the students more control and self-determination in the class in several ways; first, I will no longer go into class with a predetermined topic, but instead allow the students to decide the topic together. After the

students decide on a topic, I will go to Google with them and we will find an article, video or picture to read or watch; then we will use it to talk about keywords. Second, I will let the students “drive” the class more during the group work activity by modifying what I do. The class will be put into groups, assigned a certain type of information and then allowed to discover the information and answers necessary to complete the activity. After a certain amount of time, each group will report back and teach the other groups about what they’ve learned/discovered. This will help because research has found that “participating in the jigsaw session resulted in positive outcomes for students” (Hidi, 1998, p.225). I really enjoyed doing the Antarctica jigsaw activity in class and think it would be a useful activity in my own classes.

In terms of Recognition, I will continue to recognize and praise students, both publicly and privately in class, when they participate and are actively engaged in class. I will try to do more of this in class, but I don’t plan to drastically change what I do here.

I will modify my approach in terms of Grouping by incorporating some additional activities into the class that allow students to work collaboratively, like the jigsaw activity I described above. I will continue to encourage students to work together collaboratively and will try my best to create a kind of temporary learning community in my classroom even though the students will only be working with me one-time for an hour or two. My focus on allowing the students to “drive” the class more will hopefully create more of a classroom learning environment. Having students work together on the jigsaw activity will also increase the feelings of relatedness between the students in the class; “small-group cooperative learning methods...promote friendships and prosocial interaction among students who differ in achievement, gender, race, ethnicity, and handicapping conditions, and have positive effects on

outcomes such as self-esteem, academic self-confidence, liking for the class, liking and feeling liked by classmates, and dispositions toward empathy and social cooperation” (Brophy, 2010, p. 171).

In terms of Evaluation, I want to do a better job of teaching students how to evaluate their own work and what they find. I spend a lot of time and energy in my classes working with students on how to evaluate information and sources, and we do an activity together where we evaluate a source, but I stress the importance and purpose of doing this instead of focusing the students on thinking about how they themselves evaluate the information and sources they find. It is important for them to be able to do this on their own since “an authority figure is not always available to give students feedback on their developing competencies. Students should be encouraged and taught how to evaluate their own work and monitor their own progress” (Stipek, 2002, p. 105). I will continue to monitor how well students are “getting it” through observation, polls and clicker questions because I think they work and allow me to reteach topics that are not understood.

The Time factor is one of the biggest challenges I face. I only meet with the students once, for an hour or two, and generally have no other opportunities for working with the students. I hope to start meeting with the class instructors before the class (as I mentioned above), instead of just through email as I do now, and I also hope to better enumerate the different ways students can receive help from me and the library and distill any of the “library anxiety” students may feel. Since I can only show them so much in an hour or two, and can only expect them to remember so much from the class, I need to encourage them to seek help whenever they are having a problems/difficulties; “sometimes teachers need to remind

students that having difficulty is not a reason for fear or embarrassment-that all students, even teachers, need to ask questions and seek assistance when they are developing new skills” (Stipek, 2002, p. 107). This will hopefully lead to more learning opportunities for the students and let them receive the help at the point of need which we have found to be very beneficial.

Expected Outcome and Result

I expect that by making these changes I will be able to better meet the needs of my students. I have many Ulysses-type students in my classes and I hope the proposed changes to my instruction session will allow me to better demonstrate the importance of the information, skills, resources, tools and process of researching I am sharing with the students. If I can tie the class material to the students’ research, help them become more comfortable using the resources I am showing them, give them more self-determination and choice in the activities, and better relate the class to their actual needs then I think I will help increase the motivation of my students. I will work each semester to incorporate these changes and continually assess the class and my instruction to see if the changes are making a difference. I am very open to continually improving my teaching and the techniques I use to motivate and teach my students and I am confident that I will be able to do so over time.

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