

Deficit thinking and library instruction: How to check assumptions and build upon students' strengths

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Workshop at Maryland Institute College of Art
Baltimore, MD, 13 August 2019

Overview

- Intro to the workshop topic
- Scenario 1: Conversation with a professor
 - Read and respond in small groups, followed by share out and discussion
- Scenario 2: International student participation in class
 - Read and respond in small groups, followed by share out and discussion
- Wrap up and Q&A

Workshop objectives

1. Be able to define and identify deficit thinking in library instruction
2. Learn and share strategies to teach information literacy in ways that affirm students' strengths and draw attention to structural issues

Deficit thinking shapes our approaches to information literacy and library instruction without our being aware.

We must actively resist deficit thinking to provide meaningful education.

Deficit thinking “manifests in practice by believing that students who in any way do not conform to a ‘traditional’ or privileged financial situation, home life, or route to education are not likely to succeed.”

– Chelsea Heinbach, Brittany Paloma Fiedler, Rosan Mitola, and Emily Pattni

“Dismantling Deficit Thinking: A Strengths-Based Inquiry Into the Experiences of Transfer Students In and Out of Academic Libraries,” 2019

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OF THE FACULTY.
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Deficit thinking and info lit

An overemphasis on certain types of information, including information that is textual, academic, peer-reviewed, and produced in the Global North, limits the ways information literacy is approached.

Alternatives to deficit thinking

- Discussing other sources of knowledge beyond databases, Google, and the internet
- Using teaching methods based on student contributions and interests
- Academic sources “need to be understood as probably not the complete story, but as a story mediated through another person” (Larson & Vaughan, “Opening to the Margins,” 2019)

Scenario 1

Conversation with a professor

You run into a professor who recently requested a library instruction session. In regards to the request, he says his students are using “crappy” sources and wants you to “tell them what the good ones are.” He claims that students are using the first page of Google results as sources, and are not going the extra mile to find more appropriate sources.

This scenario and questions are adapted from:

Amanda Folk & Sara D. Miller, “Deficit or equity: Decoding implicit thinking and practice in information literacy teaching and learning,” presented at the ACRL Student Learning & Information Literacy Discussion Forum, 2019 ALA Annual Conference.

Scenario 1

Share out

1. Do this professor's concerns reflect deficit thinking? How so?
2. What are potential challenges the students might be encountering?
3. What are possible assumptions that may not be communicated to students?
4. How might you work with this professor in order to address their concern?
Possible examples: revising an assignment, designing a workshop or session, using specific pedagogical approaches, discussing scaffolding or low-stakes assignments, etc.
5. What do you think would be the most effective way for you to promote an anti-deficit approach with this professor?

Scenario 2

International student participation in class

June is an international student for whom English is an additional language, and is in the first year of her studies. She is coming from a culture where students defer to the instructor. On the day her class is scheduled for a library instruction session, she shows up to the library classroom and sits down, unsure what to expect. As other students enter the classroom and get settled, you notice June looks uneasy.

Scenario 2

Share out

1. How might you create a welcoming classroom environment for June?
2. Many methods for student engagement rely on active learning and collaboration. How might you accommodate June's cultural-educational background while also creating a participatory classroom?
3. Deficit thinking focuses on learners' lack of knowledge rather than what experience they bring to learning. What is a low-stakes way of centering student knowledge in this scenario?
4. Critical library instruction involves questioning power and privilege. How can these issues be brought up in a setting where some learners may not be used to challenging dominant beliefs and ideologies?

Recommended resources

- Char Booth, “On Information Privilege,” *info-mational* (2014).
<https://infomational.com/2014/12/01/on-information-privilege/>
- Amanda L. Folk, “Drawing on Students’ Funds of Knowledge: Using Identity and Lived Experience to Join the Conversation in Research Assignments,” *Journal of Information Literacy* 12, no. 2 (2018): 44–59. <https://ojs.lboro.ac.uk/JIL/article/view/LLC-V12-I2-1>
- Kim L. Morrison, “Informed Asset-Based Pedagogy: Coming Correct, Counter-Stories from an Information Literacy Classroom,” *Library Trends* 66, no. 2 (2017): 176–218.
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/686890>
- Vikki C. Terrile, “Critical Pedagogies to Combat the Deficit Model in Community College Libraries: A Perspective,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* (2019).
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2019.02.003>

Thank you!

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