

Book Review - Active Learning Techniques for Librarians

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Walsh, A. & Inala, P. (2010) *Active learning techniques for librarians: practical examples* Oxford: Chandos

As a librarian who is keen to ensure that training sessions result in learning and that interactive elements are incorporated where possible, the title of this book had an obvious appeal. With its accessible style and large variety of examples it does not disappoint.

In this book Walsh and Inala have collated an impressive array of examples which librarians can use to integrate active learning techniques into their training sessions. The authors use a definition of active learning to be "learning by doing" (p. 5) and the creation of "...an environment where students can take charge of their learning, see the relevance in it and engage in it, instead of having information just delivered to them." (p. 6)

The main section of the book is devoted to practical examples of active learning techniques and is divided into three sections:

starting and finishing a training session, using web 2.0 technologies and student induction events. There is also a section on lesson plans.

Examples of the types of techniques include: "Good search, bad search" (p. 45) and "Quality or not" (p. 52). In the first example, attendees at a training session are handed an example of a search strategy and are invited to identify its good and bad elements. They are then asked to work in groups to suggest improvements. In the "Quality or not" example attendees use examples of reports of research findings, for example a newspaper article, and compare this with the actual research from the original journal article.

All the examples of active learning techniques are explained with the following headings:

- Uses
- Materials required
- Notes
- How to use it
- Variations and pitfalls.

The lesson plans section offers practical examples of how the techniques can be put into practice with detailed advice about timings and suitable audiences.

The suggested activities have something to suit all budgets and confidence levels with technology. Some examples require little more than a few pieces of coloured card while others, such as

"Wall of text" (p. 76) require access to particular software or hardware. Most of the activities are aimed at reasonably small groups of attendees; there are fewer examples aimed at large groups. The book is aimed at all librarians involved in the delivery of training and many of the techniques could be adapted for use in different settings.

The range of techniques is wide and I think it would be unlikely that many librarians will make use of all the suggestions. Some suggestions will probably be best suited to use with groups of secondary school pupils for example "Go to your post" (p. 25) and "Hangman", (p. 26). Other activities will be most effective in a further or higher education setting or within the NHS, for example "I will do it" (p. 29) where attendees are encouraged to reflect on their learning and how they will apply it in practice or "Referencing jigsaws" (p. 54) where delegates rearrange laminated cards containing bibliographic information into an accurate and complete reference. The section on using web 2.0 technologies such as Twitter and Delicious gives the book a high degree of currency, but will ultimately date the content very quickly.

Overall the book contains much practical advice and many examples and I believe that it makes a useful contribution to literature about information skills training. After reading Walsh and Inala's advice there is no excuse for delivering a 'chalk and talk style' training session ever again.

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