

Do Library Assistants Teach When Responding to Enquiries? Pedagogy on the NHS Library Front Desk.

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Front Desk Teaching Tips

Make a Personal Connection

Learning is cognitive and emotional. Library customers will learn more effectively in a relaxing and friendly situation.

Use Critical Examples

Teaching someone to search the library catalogue? Try using an example which is particularly critical today such as healthcare experiences of transgender patients. Such examples are more memorable and begin a conversation on key social justice issues too.³

Leave Room for Mistakes

We learn through our mistakes; expecting to learn perfectly the first time places unrealistic pressure on the learner. If a library customer is rushing ahead in a resource tutorial and making mistakes then let them do this.

Dialogue not Monologue

It's difficult to learn in a one-sided conversation because knowledge formation is social.⁴ Make sure you keep asking your library customer questions during your enquiry teaching response to check their engagement.

Be a Lifelong Learner

Whether it's a musical instrument or a new recipe, continuing to learn means you can relate to the process of learning. You'll also become more perceptive to what teaching methods are effective.



What is Pedagogy?

*"Pedagogy is the study of the theory and practice of education. It is concerned with the underlying values and principles that influence our approach to learning, teaching and assessment."*¹

Libraries have a significant role in learning and teaching. By association, pedagogy is strategically important for libraries because it guides their approach to teaching.

Library Assistants in Teaching

- Most NHS library assistants are based at a front desk. Giving guidance and instruction from there is part of the role, but instruction becomes teaching when you 'go beyond fact finding in reference interactions by working with users to empower them with information-seeking skills of their own.'²
- Teaching comes in many forms. When library assistants give customers information literacy skills they are teaching, whether this is via creating a library leaflet or guiding a library customer through using the catalogue.
- As Evidence Based Medicine enables librarians to work outside the library, their backup support for the front desk cannot be guaranteed. Library assistants must be able to handle more in-depth enquiries, and responding with small teaching interactions.
- A basic understanding of pedagogy can help paraprofessional staff to make their teaching interactions more effective.

Reference List

- 1 CILIP Information Literacy Group, 'Pedagogic Theory', CILIP Information Literacy Group, [n.d.] <<https://infolit.org.uk/teaching/developing-your-teaching/pedagogic-theory/>> [accessed 29 May 2019].
 - 2 Esther Grassian, 'Information Literacy and Instruction: Teaching and Learning Alternatives: A Global Overview', *Reference and User Services Quarterly*, 56.4 (2017), 232-239 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5860/rusq.56.4.232>> (p. 232).
 - 3 Jill Barr-Walker & Claire Shariff, 'Critical Librarianship in Health Sciences Libraries: An Introduction', *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 107.2 (2019), 1-7 <<https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2019.620>> (p. 259).
 - 4 James K. Elmborg, 'Teaching at the Desk: Towards a Reference of Pedagogy', *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 2.3 (455-464), <<https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2002.0050>> (p. 457).
- All images are CC0

For a more detailed discussion on this topic please scan the QR code or go to <https://parallellibrary.home.blog/2019/05/30/how-i-started-thinking-about-teaching-from-a-health-library-assistant-perspective/>

