Leveraging Visual Literacy to Engage and Orient First-Year College Students in the Library

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Leveraging visual literacy to engage and orient first-year college students in the Library

Melissa Clark, MA-LIS, MA-HDEP, Ralph W. Steen Library

Introduction
Too often incoming students leave library orientation sessions feeling overwhelmed and overstressed, which results in the library becoming one more intimidating obstacle to them. However, this does not need to be the case. Visual literacy and visual culture can be leveraged to engage students and improve library orientation sessions.

In the fall of 2017 and 2018, students in 28 SFA 101 sections engaged in an alternate approach to library orientation.

Definitions and Theories

Visual Literacy — “a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences” (Debes, 1969)

Social Development Theory (Lev Vygotsky) — mediators, such as people (e.g., peer teachers) and structured activities (e.g., scaffolding), are required for development of higher-level cognitive skills (Kozulin, 2003)

Social Cognitive Theory (Albert Bandura) — skill can only be gained from enactive experience and analysis of the resultant sensory feedback (Bandura, 1986)

The Activity
Working as a group, students were assigned 3 items to locate in the library, using visual cues instead of traditional directions, such as title, collection, or call number.

After finding each item, students:
- Took a picture and uploaded it to a cloud-based, multimedia sharing application,
- Returned to the classroom to give a short presentation on what they found,
- Listened and learned from their peers and their experiences.

Assessment

Task Completion: Each of 174 groups was assigned 3 items to find (N = 522).

Students found and uploaded a photo successfully 494 times, for an overall success rate of 94.64%.

Affective Response: Student photos were also rated according to an adaptation of the PANAS (Figure 3).

Of the photos available for scoring (N = 398), students appeared to show significantly more positive (M = 2.97, SD = 0.61) than negative (M = 1.09, SD = 0.10) emotions, t(397) = -55.28, p = .000.

Next Steps

→ Present activity and data analysis at the Association of College & Research Libraries’ Annual Conference in Cleveland this spring.

→ Develop a Neutral Affect scale to supplement the Positive and Negative scales in PANAS.

→ Introduce a self-reported measure of students’ affective response to complement and confirm observational data.

Selected Bibliography


