REFLECTIVE TEACHING, EFFECTIVE LEARNING

INSTRUCTIONAL LITERACY FOR LIBRARY EDUCATORS

CHAR BOOTH

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Teaching Effectiveness

GOALS

- Discuss the "Curse of Knowledge" and the **SUCCESs approach** to creating streamlined messages.
- Explore the qualities of **effective** (and ineffective) **educators**.
- Develop the concepts of **teacher identity** and **instructional philosophy**.
- Describe the **WIIFM principle** ("What's in it for me?") and how it guides the learning process.
- Describe maintaining current awareness with a **personal learning environment** (PLE).

In this chapter, I explore the qualities of effective instructors, and start things off with a brief note on terminology. Throughout *Reflective Teaching, Effective Learning,* I use several similar-sounding terms to describe different aspects of instruction:

- A *learning object* is any item, lesson, tutorial, text, website, or course created with the purpose of teaching or explaining something.
- An *educational scenario* is the context and environment in which instruction occurs.
- *Instructional messages* engage learners with content and communicate teacher identity.
- *Targets* are the goals, objectives, and outcomes that provide the foundation for objects, scenarios, and messages.
- These elements form a *learning interaction*—the in-person, media-based, or technology-assisted communication between student, instructor, and learning object.

In sum: This book is a learning object, and by reading it you are engaging in an educational scenario. I use instructional messages to focus your attention

on a series of targets, all of which combine to create a learning interaction between you, the reader, and me, the author. Ideally, the interplay of these factors results in the formation of useful knowledge by the learner and the accumulation of meaningful experience by the educator. Less ideally, if either party is unable, unmotivated, incapable, or unwilling to create meaning from the interaction, surface-level learning and something that resembles post-traumatic stress occurs instead.

LIBRARIES, NERDS, AND THE "CURSE OF KNOWLEDGE"

If you are currently staring at this learning object, chances are good that you are, like myself, something of a nerd. There are many kinds of nerds: band nerds, book nerds, Twitter nerds, metal nerds, gaming nerds. Under the cat sweaters, Wii controllers, pocket protectors, Androids, or band uniforms, at the core of any nerd you will find an individual with enough passion to let something that interests them take over a bit of their personality. Nerd passion is fueled by a desire to *know*—to be expert, to specialize, and to understand. Since time out of mind, libraries have been sanctuaries for hobbyists, geeks, and nerds, or anyone else who is okay with the fact that they are self-motivated learners. As librarians, we are nerds for knowledge. By making information more findable, usable, and interpretable, we help others in their quest for specialization. This makes us nerd enablers—and therefore more accurately described as *uber-* or *meta*-nerds. Libraries are created for nerds by meta-nerds, so it is not surprising that library educators tend to suffer from an acute case of the "Curse of Knowledge" as we go about instruction.[1] The Curse of Knowledge is the state of being so expert that you have forgotten what it is like to not know something—or, in our case, to not know how to find or evaluate something.

The problem with libraries is that the people who use them are usually not experts, yet we tend to orient ourselves toward expert users. Non-, semi-, and anti-nerds actually make up the vast majority of our patrons. Most people use libraries because they need to do something—finish their taxes, write a paper, research a health problem, or find a quiet place to study. They are there by information necessity and may have much less of a burning desire to know than their nerdier counterparts. I would estimate that, in any given library, four out of five people are on the path of least resistance, yet our learning objects, information products, and buildings are often directed toward the one remaining self-directed learner—the one who most closely resembles us. This has a way of muddying the waters for typical patrons and preventing them from perceiving how they can use information and productivity technologies more functionally. This is why building our own instructional literacy is important: Every learner could use a few straightforward lessons from us, not only about how to accomplish their information goals with insight and critical thinking, but on what exactly, libraries and librarians can help them *do*.

SINK OR SWIM

Because I was well mentored, my introduction to teaching was relatively painless compared to that of others I know. A few worst-case-scenario examples: After being hired at a public library, one decidedly monolingual friend of mine with no teaching experience found herself tossed into a classroom with thirty nonnative English speakers, many of whom had little experience using a computer. Another was "volunteered" to teach a semester-long, for-credit information literacy class at a large research university on her first day, with only a week to prepare and virtually no guidance. A third began teaching an online course at a community college midsemester, only to discover that half of her students were blithely plagiarizing their assignments the week after a module on information responsibility.

All managed to meet their challenges, but each remembers the sensation of feeling totally unprepared and scrambling for strategies. These examples may be extreme, but they describe a common situation—a librarian staring down an unfamiliar instructional scenario confused, intimidated, or both. Like any other traumatic experience, rushing headlong into teaching can leave lasting scars. Most of us have had "sink or swim" moments as educators, which can occur in any teaching scenario—not just the unfamiliar ones, and not just when you are starting out. Some experience fear or nervousness every time they face a classroom; for others, instructional confidence comes naturally. Although jumping in feet first is an excellent motivator, it can also lead to a situation wherein decisions are made defensively rather than intentionally.

While there are recognized qualities common to strong educators, what makes one teacher "good" is

not necessarily universal. Individuality is more important than conforming to a mandated modus operandi, and it is useful to examine how audience and context influences instructional impact. One way of finding common denominators for pedagogical effectiveness among library instructors is to consider our shared challenges:

> Many library educators are involved in instruction on a part-time basis and therefore lack the immersive challenge that allows other educators to develop skills quickly and keep current and engaged.
>
> Teaching librarians tend to have more limited interactions with learners, meaning that it can be difficult to see immediate or long-term evidence of our interventions.
>
> Materials and lessons are often repeated, which can generate a sense of redundancy or malaise.
>
> Library instructors don't follow a mandated program of certification or continuing education, meaning our instructor development is largely self-regulated and context-specific.
>
> Instructional technologies are constantly changing, and in order to stay current and informed, a strategic evaluation of our own knowledge and abilities is key.
>
> Our educational contexts and institutional resources vary, making mandated curriculum nearly impossible to achieve (and consequently difficult to train around shared content).

WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEACHER?

Learning is a central aspect of human existence in all but the most dire of situations, and people tend to experience instructor upon instructor throughout their lifetimes. In each phase of my own life as a student, a few educators stand out. In high school I had a garrulous history teacher who would get so lost in his own cowboy yarns that he sometimes forgot to lecture, but who designed such creative assignments that I remember them perfectly. One of my professors at Reed College verged on depression when our papers weren't up to par and would jump on the table and sing show tunes if conversation lagged in seminar.

Another, feared and adored for her telepathic tendency to call on those who hadn't finished the reading, refused to let an idea go before it was fully explored and would rake us over the coals with hilarious, sadistic joy if we didn't talk points through to their logical conclusion. If I put my mind to it I could fill the chapter with mini-profiles of excellent teachers, whom I still meet with wonderful regularity.

What do these individuals have in common, and what inspires me to remember them? Their methods and content differed, but one thing is common: each derived obvious satisfaction from teaching and had high expectations of their students. All went about their jobs with a palpable self-awareness that allowed them to engage, and a personal investment that helped them devote intellectual and emotional energy to their trade. Similar characteristics are true of excellent presenters and designers, who invest in content and engage with audiences to the point that their interest becomes contagious. This is the desired effect: in the case of my best teachers, their motivation made me want to show them what I was made of. Some library educators may feel that our interactions with learners are too limited to achieve this dynamic, which so often requires the time to build real relationships. However, even in the briefest or most virtual of interactions it is possible to channel a sincere enthusiasm and sense of personality that helps participants engage with you and the material more meaningfully. Instructional literacy is in part a process of coming to believe in the value of your own contributions and your ability to be memorable, which simply helps you be more *there*.

Instructors You Remember

Think back on the teachers in your life that stand out. Why do you remember them? Were they exceptionally knowledgeable, funny, or odd? Did they take humdrum subjects and make them interesting, or use unexpected examples or analogies to help you think about things from a different angle? They probably found ways to draw you in no matter how dry their subject matter, or gave you personal attention that made you more interested in performing well. In activity 1.1, list the three strongest instructors or presenters from your own learner experience and identify three characteristics that made them personally effective.

When I create my own list, I notice that each of my bests has variations on the themes of humor, intelligence, and personality. Not surprisingly, there is a

Activity 1.1 **Your Best Teachers**			
Example: Professor X	challenging	insightful	well-spoken
1)			
2)			
3)			

mirror effect in the qualities I strive for in my own instruction and design. Think hard about your own list and draw a lesson from what this signifies that you value in other educators; it is probable that these are the qualities you would most like to possess. Let these characteristics act as benchmarks in the ongoing process of shaping your teaching identity.

Instructors You Have Tried to Forget

By no means do I encourage negativity, but face it—some teachers are worse than others. Imagine my vexation at needing to call out another undergraduate professor for dropping an inconceivably biased remark during class, then dealing with his retaliatory fallout for the rest of the semester. Needless to say, I withdrew from the learning scenario: I retained next to nothing from that point on and resented even having to show up. The flip side of developing an instructional effectiveness strategy is thinking about teacher attributes that have prevented you from learning. From the above experience I came to perceive that it is crucial to strive for cultural sensitivity in speech and action, and to never punish a student for legitimately and respectfully challenging me. In activity 1.2, list three less-than-effective educators (give them code names if this makes you feel guilty) and describe their negative teaching attributes.

Memorable Informal Learning

Because learning takes many forms, teaching effectiveness has to do with more than the traits of individuals. As the information environment becomes increasingly digital, mobile, and social, instructional spaces become more fluid; this expands the potential to apply innovative pedagogies and create less structured learning interactions. Part of what I hope to do in this book is inspire you to think about how effective learning happens outside of the strictures of "traditional" education. Think about it: Maybe you

spent a year obsessing over Dungeons and Dragons as a teenager or saw a nature documentary as a child that you've never forgotten. An example from my own recent experience is Common Craft (www.common craft.com), which has the motto "Our Product Is Explanation." They create simple animated tutorials that translate confusing technological concepts into plain language, some of which I use in training and research education.

Considering what makes nontraditional or informal objects and scenarios hit home can provide some of the best strategic fodder for improving your day-to-day praxis. Examples do not have to be "next-generation" or even contemporary: I personally love the public television children's show *Electric Company,* in both its wildly successful 1970s form and its more recent incarnation (www.pbskids.org/electric company/). This interactive mix of music, dialogue, quick vignettes, and problem-based strategies aligns its message to the needs and characteristics of its audience: You can barely tell that you are learning, which makes you want to keep watching. Another example from public media is WNYC's *RadioLab* (www.wnyc .org/shows/radiolab), which breaks down complex scientific topics using quirky audio production and accessible language. In activity 1.3, list three effective informal instructional objects, interactions, or environments you have experienced and identify the characteristics that made them memorable.

Turning It Around

By reflecting on what makes individual educators and informal learning effective or ineffective, you are creating a mental bank of qualities you either value or want to avoid. For example, while I believe that I am an engaging presenter with a defined design style and sense of personal conviction that I communicate as I teach, I also know that I often rush, experience visible nervousness, and am sometimes less than able to adapt quickly to a situation that requires a major

Activity 1.2 **Your Worst Teachers**			
Example: Instructor Y	arrogant	reactionary	biased
1)			
2)			
3)			

change of plans. Use the previous three activities to consider your own teaching characteristics; be conscious of the positive traits you possess, the concrete ways you would like to improve, and how your learning materials might have more impact. The goal is not to tear yourself down, but to identify things of value you bring to an instructional scenario as well methods for improvement.

DEVELOPING A TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I am first and foremost a Texan, which means I rely on mottos, slogans, and truisms of all kinds to keep my chin up in the face of adversity. For this reason, some time ago I wrote out my "teaching philosophy" as a way of focusing on what it is that motivates me to help people learn:

> I want to redefine the way people think about librarians, inspire as much critical thought as I do laughter, make sure they come away with something they can actually use, and most important, to never, ever, ever bore anyone to tears.

Learning from other library educators is a ceaselessly useful strategy. I was curious about the teaching philosophies of others, so I asked a number of individuals I personally know to have considerable impact on library education to engage in the same exercise. All I specified was a word limit (75 or less) and the request that they describe "what motivates you to (or as you) teach or present, the characteristics that you aspire to as an instructor or educator, and/or what informs how you encourage learning in others." Here are the responses I received, in no particular order:

> The very first step in learning is simply exposure. Focus on exposure first, find your students' motiva-

tion and encourage discovery, and you have a recipe for learning. (Helene Blowers, creator and architect of Learning 2.0: 23 Things)

I want to engage people by challenging their underlying assumptions and then inspire them by providing examples of existing innovative programs. I hope to encourage them to critically assess their current priorities and practices and consider whether they should reconceive their role, taking into account both their professional values and the imperatives of the current technology-oriented environment. (Joan Lippincott, Director, Coalition for Networked Information)

Working in an institution where the students are well prepared and highly motivated, my main goal is to convince them that librarians are 1) welcoming and 2) that we know some stuff. My approach, as it has evolved over the last year or so, is to, believe it or not, throw library jargon at them, thus demystifying advanced research techniques and, by giving a hands-on assignment, helping them put the techniques into practice. (Jenna Freedman, Coordinator of Reference Services and Zine Librarian, Barnard College. www.jenna.openflows.com)

If I am perceived to be a teacher then I have failed. My objective first and foremost is to challenge my students' imaginations and creative capabilities. Real learning is bold and intoxicating and nonlinear. It should be slightly subversive with a tad of radical. I see it as an ongoing transformation that occurs as a series of personal epiphanies. Instruction should flow serendipitously. (Brian Mathews, Assistant University Librarian, Outreach and Academic Services, University of California, Santa Barbara)

I believe that teaching is really about discovery and learning; one of the greatest joys of teaching is the unique story of learning that unfolds for me and

Activity 1.3 **Memorable Learning Objects**

Example: Electric Company	fast-paced, story-based narrative	visually engaging	contemporary and informal
1)			
2)			
3)			

my students as we explore and experiment together side by side. I try to cultivate a participatory climate that values risk taking and learning experiences that are organic. It is in the messiness and stickiness of learning where real meaning is constructed. (Buffy Hamilton, Media Specialist/Teacher-Librarian, Creekview High School, Canton, Georgia)

My goal in presenting is to help participants create meaning by sharing information clearly, logically, and as simply as possible (but no simpler). Stories, analogies, a "beginner mind," and a nonjudgmental outlook help me foster learning, which happens at that magical intersection between the information being presented and the life experiences and unique perspectives of each learner. My ultimate goal is always to empower participants to make more effective choices. (Peter Bromberg, Assistant Director, South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative, and contributor to www.librarygarden.net)

I strive to convey enthusiasm and passion, to communicate relevance in a way that is both engaging and useful, and to achieve at least one genuine "light bulb" moment. If learners—even a few—have been encouraged to think about something in a way they haven't before, if I have enabled them to become active participants in their own learning, I have succeeded. (Catherine Fraser Riehle, Instructional Outreach Librarian and Assistant Professor of Library Science, Purdue University Libraries)

I strive to always be a student of good pedagogy, to discover and experiment with the latest theory and best practice, and to push myself to be a better teacher. To teach well is to create a permanent change of behavior in the learner. My constant goal is to deliver an outstanding and memorable learning experience, one that leaves students permanently changed for the better even if only in some small way. (Steven

Bell, Associate University Librarian for Research and Instruction, Temple University)

You know what gets me excited? Information. Finding it, thinking about it, critiquing it, wrestling with it, arguing about it, producing it. And I believe every student in my classroom feels the same way, even if they don't know it yet. (Emily Drabinski, Electronic Resources and Instruction Librarian, Long Island University, Brooklyn)

Technology instruction should give everyone a chance to succeed and solve their own real-world problems in a setting that is safe yet challenging. A good instructor facilitates the student's own learning objectives and helps them figure out what their questions are. Learning can be fun and painless. (Jessamyn West, rural librarian, MetaFilter moderator, and owner of www.librarian.net)

Libraries and librarians are faced with a technological and societal wave of change that is ever increasing as we move farther into the 21st century. Preparing new graduates to deal with constant change, use current and emerging technological tools to further the mission of their institutions, and meet the needs of communities of library users while never losing sight of our foundational values and principles is of utmost importance to me as an LIS educator. (Michael Stephens, Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Dominican University, River Forest, Illinois)

I want to always remember that when I'm teaching, I'm learning. Part of my job is to embrace the vulnerability inherent in learning something new, critically examine my "authority" and realize what that vulnerability looks and feels like to those in my classrooms. I also think it's my responsibility to point out the flaws and bias inherent in information, both

in the ways we gather it and the ways it's presented. (Lia Friedman, Instruction and Outreach Librarian, Head of Public Services, Arts Library, University of California, San Diego)

My role is to help create a community of learners who are responsible and responsive to each other as they build on contextual foundations and extend themselves to acquire new knowledge and skills through innovative connections with communities like those they will serve throughout their profession. (Loriene Roy, ALA past president, and Professor, School of Information, University of Texas, Austin)

I seek to make possible an environment in which inquiry and hands-on learning are encouraged, where information is accessible and usable, and where students learn how to manage the obstacles inherent in the information search process. It is the place of struggle where learning takes root, and fostering an environment that makes it safe for students to struggle productively is a critical part of my teaching practice. (Maria Accardi, Assistant Librarian and Coordinator of Instruction, Indiana University Southeast, New Albany)

My goal is to make students not need me. I was one of those stubborn learners who never asked for help, so I want to help students develop the skills that will allow them to independently find and evaluate information. While I try to show them that the librarians are friendly and useful, I ultimately want them to be able to think critically about how to find information and about what they find without us. (Meredith Farkas, Head of Instructional Initiatives at Norwich University, Vermont, adjunct faculty member at San Jose State University School of Library and Information Science)

What I love about these philosophies is that, in addition to expressing personal conviction and an appropriately fierce learner focus, each pinpoints almost exactly how their authors have motivated me and countless others to become stronger educators and librarians. Not only that, every one contains one or more instructional best practices well worth reiterating:

Me—try not to be boring.

Helene—focus on motivation and discovery.

Joan—challenge assumptions and use real examples.

Jenna—demystify jargon and make things hands-on.

Brian—defy expectations and invite creativity.

Buffy—let learning be organic, even if it's messy.

Peter—teach simply and empower participants.

Catherine—engage people with their own process.

Steven—push yourself to improve.

Emily—be stoked, because it's contagious.

Jessamyn—invite questioning and let learners define their own goals.

Michael—be prepared to adapt.

Lia—question authority in information and in yourself.

Loriene—create a community of learners.

Maria—foster a safe learning environment.

Meredith— make students not need you.

ACHIEVING AUTHENTICITY

Many of the teaching characteristics I identify in this chapter are confirmed by research to be common among successful educators, such as reflectiveness, personal investment, humor, organization, and theoretical knowledge.[2] One quality in particular comes through in every teaching philosophy I received: *authenticity*. Authenticity is the capacity to communicate your self—your personality and sense of identity—during instruction, an overarching concept that covers many qualities of instructional effectiveness. Per Laursen lists seven qualities of authentic teachers,[3] who

- have personal intentions concerning their teaching
- embody their intentions
- have realistic intentions
- relate to students as fellow human beings
- work in contexts fruitful to their intentions
- cooperate intensely with colleagues
- are able to take care of their personal-professional development

Goal orientation, interpersonal connection, and genuine enthusiasm for the task at hand are all aspects

of authenticity. In an *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* post, Carrie Donovan gives a convincing defense of authenticity and identity in library education: "A shift in expectations calls for teacher behavior that is purposeful, mindful, and rooted in the self. . . . For those in search of a true teacher identity, authenticity will serve as the best guide."[4] I address the role of authenticity in developing your teaching identity in the next two chapters as well as in chapter 11.

FINDING YOUR SOAPBOX

One of the most important lessons I have learned about authenticity came from Lia Friedman of UC San Diego's Arts Library, who shared her instructional philosophy earlier in the chapter. She is a true example of a teacher-advocate, someone who can captivate an audience and make them care about basically anything. When we discuss presentations we've given or sessions we've taught, she always seems to mention people that approach her afterward with questions or just wanting to chat. In my mind, this is evidence of an ability to first make content interesting enough that it raises questions, and second being approachable enough to generate the equivalent of fans at a library session.

Her strategy is simple. According to Lia, "When I'm up on my soapbox, their eyes get wider." She is describing the infectious interest you can create by communicating with conviction on any topic in which you have knowledge or expertise. Intensity of expression is a key factor in how effectively something captivates our attention, which in turn significantly affects memory and retention of detail.[5] Your soapbox becomes a place of informed sincerity that helps you speak convincingly, a necessary aspect of cultivating a voice or persona you can call upon to engage an audience (an idea I revisit in chapter 11). Your soapbox may be most useful during live teaching interactions, but it can also permeate digital learning objects through a combination of creative visual design and interactivity.

Even content that appears superficially dull can come to life when pitched from a soapbox. What's more, your soapbox can help you challenge, dispel, or leverage learner preconceptions based on your perceived profession, age, gender, ethnicity, and so forth. An example: A subject like integrative biology is not one that would typically stop me in my tracks, yet when I stumbled across an online lecture by renowned UC Berkeley anatomy professor Marian Diamond, I was riveted. Because she communicates with extraordinary conviction, defies countless stereotypes, and uses unconventional strategies to enliven a traditional delivery format, her lectures are among the top instructional videos in YouTube and have been viewed millions of times.

I had the chance fortune to run into Professor Diamond on the Berkeley campus as I was writing this chapter; I introduced myself and asked if she would mind if I used her as an example of teaching effectiveness. After complimenting me on my handshake—hers was a bonecrusher, by the way—she graciously said that she would be delighted, image and all. Even in this brief interaction she communicated infectious enthusiasm and a willingness to engage. While teaching, Professor Diamond constantly drops pithy insights on pedagogy and learning she has picked up from decades of experience, many of which are described in physiological terms that connect deftly to the subject of instruction. Hundreds of comments on my favorite lecture (in which she spends a good five minutes holding a human brain pulled with a flourish from a hat box; see figure 1.1) explode the perennial myth that contemporary students cannot be interested in learning, such as, "This woman is a great teacher, hope my lecturer next sem is half as good as this. . . . she is cool" and "That is a kickass teacher. i need to get her."

Marian Diamond is an individual who has used her soapbox to turn the Curse of Knowledge on its head; she understands exactly how to communicate just enough of what she knows to make people want to learn more. I highly encourage you to watch her unforgettable lectures at www.youtube.com/user/ UCBerkeley. For additional examples of the power of the instructional soapbox, view any of the presentations at the Technology, Entertainment, and Design website (www.ted.com), an online mini-lecture clearinghouse that offers "riveting talks from remarkable people, free to the world." Topics with the potential to come across as arcane or esoteric are made captivating and understandable by TED lecturers, such as Hans Rosling's fascinating and visually engaging treatment of international economic development or Oliver Sacks discussing blindness and neural imaging.

BUILD YOUR OWN SOAPBOX

How do you locate the source of infectious interest in yourself? I find that persuasion in general is more natural when you actually believe that the content you

share, including your own expertise, is worthwhile and significant. Think about what engages you in what you do; I regularly thank my lucky stars that I belong to a profession that does so much productive good, that gives me insight into the interests and abilities of so many. Do you have similar convictions about being a librarian? If this question draws a blank, think about something you care enough about to soapbox about it. Maybe it's mahjong, or quantum physics, or the Halloween costumes you just made for your three precious ferrets. When you teach, try to channel the enthusiasm you feel for something, *anything* to the task at hand. If you find that the ferrets aren't doing it for you, at least try to convince yourself of the time you can save your students, or how you can be a useful and productive agent in their working and thinking lives. Words of wisdom: if you can't make it, at least try to fake it.

One never-fail strategy is to bring more of who you are into what you teach and design. Half of your soapbox consists of sharing your expertise, but the other half consists of sharing your self; you cannot and will not catalyze knowledge-building if you bleed individuality out of every learning interaction. It pays to show at least some of who you are if you expect people to care, because it is much more difficult to write someone off who is connecting with you personally or who has humanized their own participation in the process that led them there. Too often, the instruction we encounter is dull and humorless—in Lia's words, "dead words to dead people." An essential aspect of making your content engaging involves making yourself engaging, an *affective* technique that helps create a positive emotional backdrop for your learners (I discuss affective strategies in chapters 4 and 5).[6] The more of myself I put into these pages, the more I invite you to stay with the ideas and approaches as though they were communicated in conversation rather than via a manual or textbook. Consider, for example, figure 1.2. Now that you know I wrote half of this book in a hammock, you might be less likely to dismiss me as a faceless, theory-spitting automaton.

Exposing your self during instruction can also sometimes backfire: you might take me less seriously because of my informal tone or the personal insights I share. That said, this is a strategic pedagogical decision on my part; sacrificing a modicum of my "authority" in order to create a more accessible tone is a risk I have consciously considered and accepted. Some respond well to informality in learning, others find it off-putting (if the latter is your current experience, you might consider detouring to the more abstract and instructional design-oriented chapter 7, or the research-focused chapters 4 and 5). As this parenthetical suggestion implies, it is useful to anticipate as many learner orientations as possible and connect with a
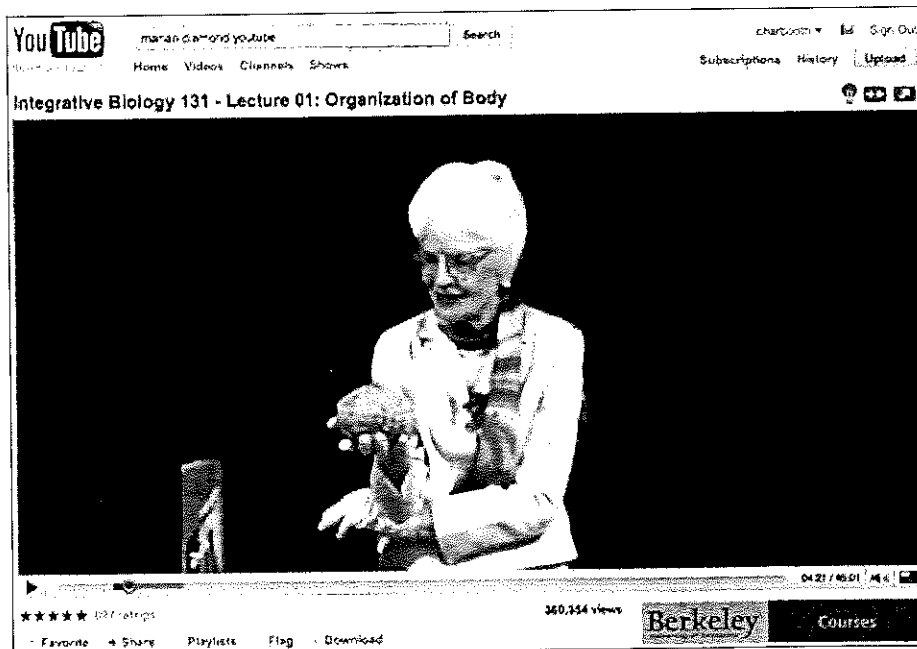

Figure 1.1
Professor Marian Diamond on her soapbox: "I want you to appreciate what you carry in the top of your heads."

broad range of participants by strategy-switching, processes I explore in greater depth in later chapters.

FINDING THE CORE: YOUR INSTRUCTIONAL MESSAGE

Your soapbox consists of identity and authenticity, but sharing a compelling message is the heart of effective instruction. I mentioned earlier in the chapter that Professor Diamond manages to turn the Curse of Knowledge on its head, encapsulating her content in interesting, accessible terms. Effective educators have an intuitive sense of what captures people's attention and holds it; they find what about their subject matter sparks interest and makes people actually want to learn (known as *intrinsic motivation;* see chapters 4 and 5). In their 2007 best seller *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die,* authors Chip and Dan Heath investigated decades of research in education, business, rhetoric, advertising, and psychology to figure out what makes some ideas last and others fade. According to them, "sticky" ideas are those that are "understandable, memorable, and effective at changing thought or behavior."[7] They argue that how you encapsulate an idea or message is more important than the technology or media you use to convey it; in other words, it is how you get at the "core" of your message that really matters. At the core of any idea that makes people listen, care, and remember are six factors, which they summarize with a simple acronym: SUCCESs (Simple Unexpected Concrete Credible Emotional Stories).[8] Each letter is a concrete step that helps you communicate messages that "stand on their own merits":

Simple—Find the Core. Share the Core.

Unexpected—Get attention: surprise. Hold attention: interest.

Concrete—Help people understand and remember. Help people coordinate.

Credible—Help people believe. Internal credibility.

Emotional—Make people care. Use the power of association. Appeal to self-interest (and not just base self-interest). Appeal to identity.

Stories—Get people to act. Stories as simulation (tell people how to act). Stories as inspiration (give people energy to act).

These factors are how myths, urban legends, jingles, commercials, parables, and slogans become so persistent. As in marketing, streamlined instructional messages can make the content and purpose of learning clearer and more memorable, both of which are essential for helping participants perceive the value of an interaction and build usable knowledge. Part of my goal in this book is to suggest strategies that help you

Figure 1.2
The author at her "desk"

drill down to the core of any presentation, class, training, tutorial, collaboration, or subject to communicate what is really important about it, why it *matters*, in order to make the most impact.

LEARNER SELF-INTEREST: THE WIIFM PRINCIPLE

Typically, what matters most to people is themselves. When creating an instructional message, it is useful to understand that learners pay more attention, try harder, and understand more clearly when they see the personal benefit of an instructional scenario or object. This is sometimes described as the "What's in it for me?" (WIIFM) principle.[9] Effective educators appeal to the self-interest of their learners by identifying and explicitly communicating this benefit in practical terms during instruction. With any type of teaching, helping your audience see the advantage of an instructional scenario is crucial to encouraging the knowledge they build to become "actionable" in the future.[10]

Maintaining awareness of WIIFM is critical to understanding your audience's needs and motivations. For example, as an author I try to use WIIFM thinking to make sure this book is worth your attention and energy. By engaging with perceived participants as though I am in a learning interaction, I am better able to imagine the self-interest of my reader base. To maintain this awareness, I try to constantly ask, *Why, and for whom, I am writing this? What do I want my readers to gain from this experience?* Reflecting on these targets keeps me focused on the all-important question: *What's in it for you as a reader/learner?* Think about your own self-interest in this learning scenario: Why are you reading this book? What do you want to gain from this experience? Thinking in this way as you plan and deliver instruction will prepare you to make a more convincing *pitch*, or the act of delivering your instructional message in a way that engages your audience and helps them understand the benefit of instruction (see chapter 11).

SHAPING YOUR AWARENESS: PERSONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Effective teaching is about more than philosophy, soapboxes, and streamlined messages; it is also important to stay invested in your own learning process.

Maintaining current awareness of emerging instructional topics and technologies is supported by creating a robust *personal learning environment* (PLE)— the combination of applications and resources that "explicitly support one's social, professional, learning, and other activities."[11] You already have a PLE, even if you've never thought about it quite so formally— whatever resources, interfaces, or services you use to keep up with what you do or what interests you. There are many information conduits you can combine to create a viable, pedagogical PLE: books like this, journals, social networking and bookmarking sites, Twitter lists and topics, RSS feeds, search and table of contents alerts, online learning communities, brick-and-mortar or virtual conferences. It's all about managing your own approach to learning about teaching and technology.

Customizing a viable PLE is a highly personal process. Your preferences and interests come into play immediately, down to the level of whether you want to browse current journal issues in print or online. Like the research process, creating a PLE is serendipitously iterative, meaning that it informs itself as one thing unexpectedly leads to another: you bookmark a blog entry that recommends teaching students about Zotero as a citation manager, which inspires you to track down more information on the project to learn how to use it better, during which you discover another blog that has useful technology information on another topic, and so forth. Your PLE should help you stay in a rhythm of keeping track of these connections. We are all busy, and it is almost impossible to follow so many information inputs at once. That said, if you set up your learning environment in a stable and nonintrusive way, you can check in on different resources related to specific projects or areas of professional interest when you have the time and inclination. Your PLE can do wonders for combating overload by narrowing the information deluge to a manageable stream, and by no means do you have to monitor everything religiously. While I rely on the tools in my personal environment of learning, I ignore them just as regularly. Consistency is more my goal, and knowing where and how to find out about something in a time-effective way when the need arises.

A description of my own PLE: I use e-mail alerts and RSS feeds to follow journal tables of contents, and Google Reader to organize various blog feeds into a series of folders tagged with labels like "design" and "instructional tech." I save drafts of presentations and PDF articles on Google Docs and Dropbox and share items with colleagues via both. I bookmark links in

Firefox and synchronize these between my home and work computers. I use Google Scholar and article databases to search for specific citations, and save them in Zotero. I network with colleagues to learn about interesting projects and new exercises. I monitor Twitter profiles and lists of educators, organizations, and librarians and use TweetDeck to search trending topics like "#OER" (open educational resources) and "shareable." I have database alerts set up for phrases like "library education" and automatically receive e-mail from organizations such as EDUCAUSE and the Pew/Internet American Life project when new articles and white papers on technology and learning are published. I browse the education and technology sections and blogs of major news outlets such as the *New York Times, Slate,* and *Wired.* I use my iPhone for accessing all of the above, as well as a tool for providing context when I run across a new topic or application on the fly. I belong to online learning communities such as LearningTimes, and attend their webcasts whenever possible. Finally, I keep my eyes and ears open in the analog world.

A few blogs I find consistently useful are *ResourceShelf, In the Library with the Lead Pipe,* the *Unquiet Librarian,* and the *Distant Librarian* for library instruction and technology; *Mashable* and *TechCrunch* for gadgets and social media; *ProfHacker* for instructional technology in higher education; and the *Centre for Learning and Performance Technologies* blog for regular teaching technology product lists such as the "Top 100 Tools for Learning." Other essential sources are the annual *Horizon Report* and *ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology,* both of which track game-changing technological trends within higher education, and other publications issued by research institutes such as the UK-based Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and professional organizations such as the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI). URLs are provided for these and other resources in the Recommended Reading section.

Taken together, all of these sources provide a steady flow of current information on teaching, libraries, and various aspects of technology. The very act of assembling useful information sources into a PLE becomes a lesson in information literacy; by locating the tools that help you become successful at using and understanding a given technology, you begin to discover new resources and build your confidence in that area. For example, learning to set up a Yahoo Pipe Reader or NetVibes account that brings in teaching and library-related blog feeds helps you see the function and benefit of RSS and drag-and-drop interfaces.

SUMMARY

- The **"Curse of Knowledge"** afflicts experts and should be challenged by a learner-focused approach to library instruction.
- Developing an **instructional philosophy** can help focus your teacher identity.
- Your **instructional soapbox** is a method of communicating your teaching philosophy and identity.
- The **SUCCESs model** can help you find the core of an instructional message.
- The **WIIFM principle** is a way to speak to a learner's self-interest.
- You can build current and experiential awareness of instructional technologies and strategies through a robust **personal learning environment** (PLE).

REFLECTION POINTS

1. Take a stab at writing your own teaching philosophy in three sentences or less.

2. Is instruction an integral part of your professional identity, or do you consider it a secondary aspect of what you do? Do you see this role changing in the future if you transition between jobs, or as a potential result of shifts within your organization?

3. Would you say that you have an instructional soapbox? Why or why not?

NOTES

1. Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (New York: Random House, 2007).
2. James Stronge, *Qualities of Effective Teachers,* 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007).
3. Per Laursen, "The Authentic Teacher," in D. Beijaard et al. (eds.), *Teacher Professional Development in Changing Conditions* (New York: Springer, 2005), 206–210.
4. Carrie Donovan, "Sense of Self: Embracing Your Teacher Identity," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe,* 2009. Inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org.
5. Sam Wang, *Talk of The Nation,* July 22, 2009, National Public Radio. See also Sandra Aamodt and Sam Wang, *Welcome to Your Brain: Why You Lose Your Car Keys but Never Forget How to Drive and Other Puzzles of Everyday Life* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008).

6. Claire Weinstein and Richard Mayer, "The Teaching of Learning Strategies," in M. Whitlock (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 315–327.

7. Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 253.

8. Ibid., 252–257.

9. Steven Bell and John Shank, *Academic Librarianship by Design: A Blended Librarian's Guide to the Tools and Techniques* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2007), 62. See also Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*.

10. George Siemens, *Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age*, elearnspace, December 12, 2004. www.elearnspace.org/Articles/connectivism.htm.

11. Larry Johnson, Alan Levine, and Rachel Smith. *The 2009 Horizon Report* (Austin: New Media Consortium, 2009), 4.