Fu Can Cook: Using Chinese Cooking Techniques to Teach Library Instruction

Fu Zhuo, Research and Instruction Librarian
University of Missouri–Kansas City
zhuo@umkc.edu
816–235–1541
June 2, 2011
Introduction

- Teaching new college students how to find academic resources within a 50-minute time frame is a challenge.

- Part of that challenge is because of the complicated research process.

- In order to make this teaching moment easier to understand, effective, and entertaining, Chinese cooking techniques are applied.
Literature Review

“Teaching is like cooking: it is about choices that inform your technique” (Sittle and Cook 5)

“Promoting scientific literacy is important...Students who have very little background in biological physics can relate to cooking” (Savarese)

“...if your goal is to engage students and to get them started searching, then tapping into students’ experiences by asking what they think is useful” (Cook 3).
“Begin your lesson planning by deciding whether the learning opportunity calls for Direct Instruction or for Student-Centered Learning. Use strategies of Direct Instruction if you need to present skills and/or concepts. Use Strategies of Student-Centered learning if your primary concern is that students experience a particular phenomenon” (Cook 18)

“Experience-based, or experiential, instructional methods...accommodated more complex and diverse approaches to learning process and outcomes; allowed for interactivity; promoted collaboration and peer learning; allowed for addressing cognitive as well as affective learning issues; and perhaps most important, fostered active learning” (Ruben 501)
How did I come up with this idea?
Planning and Design

- Buying aprons, printing database names, and borrowing a shower cap
- Planning classroom activities and using a research strategy exercise worksheet
- Comparing two processes and analogy
Diagram of Chinese Cooking Process

Choosing what to cook → Collecting ingredients → Preparing Food → Finding an approach → Stirring Fry → Adding Spices → Presenting the Dish
Diagram of Library Research Process

- Choosing a topic
- Selecting materials
- Brainstorming terms
- Forming Search Strategy
- Limiting Search Results
- Document Delivery
- Bibliography
Two Similar Processes

- Choosing what dish to make
- Choosing a topic based on a class assignment or personal interests taking into account availability of resources and scope of the topic
  - Student personal interests
  - Encyclopedias
  - Current Issues
  - Teacher’s assignments

Chinese Cooking

Library Research
Two Similar Processes

- Collecting necessary ingredients
- Selecting different types of resources that will provide proper information:
  - Books
  - Journal articles
  - Databases

Chinese Cooking

Library Research
Two Similar Processes

- Food preparation
- Locating the library catalog and database search interfaces on the library’s webpage
- Learning how to use title, subject, author, and keyword to search
Two Similar Processes

- Finding an approach based on a recipe.
- Creating a search strategy and brainstorming for search terms
- Learning how to use Boolean Operators to combine search terms

Chinese Cooking  Library Research
Two Similar Processes

- Should I bake, grill, stir fry...?
- Choosing either to go to the catalog or a database to find the information they need
  - Book review
  - Book about global warming
  - Research article of literary criticism

Chinese Cooking

Library Research
Two Similar Processes

- Stirring, adding salt, and other spices
- Narrowing down to specifics or using truncation to expand results
  - Print or electronic
  - Full-text or abstract
  - Scholarly or popular
  - Reference included or not included
Two Similar Processes

- **Tasting dishes**
- **Evaluating materials**
  - Up-to-date
  - Accurate
  - Objective
  - Level of audience intended for
  - Authoritative
  - Scholarly
  - Authentic
Two Similar Processes

- Presentation
- Citation styles
  - MLA
  - APA
  - Chicago

Chinese Cooking

Library Research
“Keep it fun.”
“Great class, lots of useful information.”
“Fu Zhuo, you are the BOMB, Thanks.”
“Loved the costume – got our attention.”
“That guy rocked! Super entertaining and educational!”
“Our instructor was AWESOME! He was nice, fun, and I learned A LOT.”
“The presentation seemed sort of rushed, but I like that you had each student try out on searching on the databases. I also thought the handout you gave us was helpful.”
“We probably didn’t need instruction on each database. The class was informative and the handout was helpful. I just have a bad memory, so I can’t remember the names.”
Benefits

- Simple and low cost to implement
- Explains a complex research process using a simple life experience
- Engages students in the class and increases classroom interaction
- Enriches library instruction pedagogy and promotes diversity in both teaching and practice
- Makes research process easier to understand and entertaining
Issues and Challenges

- How to balance means and ends?
- Will the new approach take up already limited instruction time?
- At what level is applying this new approach more appropriately, freshmen or graduate level class?
- Will the teaching faculty and students really accept this new approach?
- What will happen if the teaching faculty asks to show other databases in the class?
Conclusion

- The challenge always remains for academic librarians to teach new college students library information skills and research processes within a 50-minute time frame. By comparing a life experience such as Chinese cooking techniques, to the complicated research process, it becomes easier to understand.

- If the “Master Chef Fu” can conduct library instruction with humor, enthusiasm, and entertainment, any of you can do it too. Let us make library instruction more “juicy, tender, and delicious” as well as full of fun.
Reference


Attachment

- Identify the main ideas in your research question or statement.
- Brainstorm other words or phrases that describe each idea (related terms or synonyms).

  - Research Question or Statement

- Choose one term from each brainstormed list that you want to use in your search. (Make sure you choose one term representing each idea.)
- Use Boolean Operators such as “and”, “or”, and “not” to combine your search terms and then begin to search.