Book Review: Teaching College: The Ultimate Guide to Lecturing, Presenting, and Engaging Students by Norman Eng (2017)

Cathy Troupos, Wheaton College

Instruction librarians often face the challenge of engaging students while endeavoring to cover the required content in a relatively short period of time (e.g., a single one-hour session). And while much has been written about how tools such as polling or gaming platforms can pique interest, it is not always clear whether these efforts to increase attention also increase learning. Amid this tension of delivering content while engaging students enters Norman Eng's _Teaching College: The Ultimate Guide to Lecturing, Presenting, and Engaging Students:_ "a concise guide for the busy and frustrated instructor who wants to supercharge their pedagogy _now_" (p. 6). Drawing on his background in both marketing and K-12 education, Eng insists that the secret to engaging your students so that learning sticks comes from understanding who your audience is, why they are in your class, and how to use active-learning strategies to appeal to that specific audience.

Teaching College is presented in four parts. Part one draws on Eng's marketing experience and challenges readers to develop profiles of typical students, much the way that marketers create profiles of customers. Note this is the _typical_ student and not the _ideal_ student; we may imagine the ideal student as one who is intrinsically motivated to research meticulously or use information critically, but the typical student most likely has no such goals, and it is the typical student on whom we must focus our content. Readers who fear that this exercise will devalue our students by treating them as customers who must be pleased need not worry—the purpose of creating a student profile is not to "sell" the students on anything but rather to keep instructors "focused, grounded, and accountable to that person" (p. 29). From there, readers are encouraged to think about "big picture goals" of students and how the instruction fits into those goals. By understanding our students' motivations, Eng emphasizes, we can better connect our content with their needs so that they actually learn something.

Building on these newly developed profiles and goals, parts two through four focus on active-learning strategies straight from the K-12 toolbox. Active learning may be a familiar topic to librarians, but Eng's take differs in that he contextualizes the techniques and strategies with the motivations established in part one. That is to say, students do not just learn by doing; they learn best when doing something that has resonance with who they are and their ultimate learning goals. As with most books on teaching and instruction, some sections are not directly applicable to librarians who only teach one-shot sessions, such as how to build a compelling syllabus; others, however, most definitely have a place in library instruc-

tion, regardless of whether it is for a multi-class, semester-long course or a one-shot. For example, Eng discusses the problem-based learning technique _You / Y'all / We_ in which students first work through an issue alone and then collaborate with peers; this is followed up with an instructor-led class discussion in which the instructor narrates the process and gives advice about how to navigate thorny issues. This approach works well in library sessions that often utilize demonstration because students can "realize their extant ways of knowing won't serve them adequately" and subsequently have more motivation to follow along with the instructor (p. 54).

Application for Instruction Librarians

While the book does not really offer any new pedagogical strategies, the numerous suggestions and examples can benefit instruction librarians whether experienced or not. For example, developing a profile strikes me as a useful exercise for one-shot sessions. Even when I use backward design for my sessions, it is all too common for me to build content around what I think the outcomes should be or the classroom instructor's preferences; it is easy to ignore the motivation of the students—perhaps because I often do not get to know the students personally and don't think of them as "my" students. Books about teaching college students are generally not helpful as they often suggest spending several classes community-building—a luxury librarians usually do not have. Yet, just because I cannot develop long-term relationships with the students in front of me does not mean that I cannot think about who they are and why they are there. Hence, a profile for a first-year-writing student during the fall semester may look like this: _Maria is a first-year college student who is beginning to feel overwhelmed with the expectations of college, in general, and the requirements of the current research paper assignment, such as contributing to a scholarly conversation, exacerbate those feelings. Maria isn't sure why she is at this research session because it seems pretty easy to research—you just type in some words and phrases; other tasks are harder—such as finding a topic or knowing if sources are useful and how to use them. While Maria isn't too happy to be in this required class because she "hates" writing, she does hope that she learns how to write papers effectively for college._

Following Eng's advice, when designing the session, I need to think about how the outcomes I want for the session can best connect with Maria's goals and motivations. This is not to say that we need to throw out comprehensive information literacy and library instruction paradigms such as the Framework model just because it

is unlikely that a student would express the desire to learn that authority is constructed and contextual, but rather that we need to reframe this idea about authority in a way that intersects with the students' larger goals for the class. In this case, I may choose activities, such as case studies of different research scenarios, to show the importance of finding the right authority and format of information to write effective arguments in different college-related scenarios.

Another strategy that Eng describes that is useful to teaching librarians is "thinking aloud" (p. 221); this approach could work well in a one-shot as the instructor narrates a new process. For example, while modeling how to navigate the library website, I could narrate my thought process…*I wonder which resources are best to use when looking for business case studies; let me try the research guides…* When hitting a roadblock, the instructor keeps the narration going, demonstrating questions and ideas that can help students navigate similar challenges. Since experts can sometimes hurry through & not make evident to novices the necessary steps when teaching a tool or a process they've personally used a thousand times, utilizing this technique can help ensure that the instructor makes their thought process clear to students. Again, these ideas are not innovative to Eng; however, it is convenient to have these examples pulled together in one resource, and tying them to the idea of audience offers a new perspective on pedagogy. In addition to his examples, Eng points to many sources online where readers can discover more strategies and examples.

Readers looking for an in-depth discussion of the research behind these pedagogical strategies should look elsewhere as Eng himself acknowledges (p. 7). To be sure, there are citations, and many of them are scholarly, yet there are also references to popular sources like TED Talks and other books about learning, such as Ken Bain's *What the Best College Teachers Do*. The active-learning strategies are thoughtfully selected and discussed in more detail outside of this book, and curious readers can find enough guidance in the references and endnotes for more formal inquiry. Rather than concentrate on theory, Eng focuses on numerous examples, tips, action steps, and tools that allow readers to apply the strategies to their instruction immediately; as an interesting note, Eng suggests inviting a librarian to the classroom as one of his tips, remarking that he has learned much from such classroom visits (p. 126).

Conclusion

Teaching College is likely not the "ultimate guide" as the title purports, but it likely could be a useful tool for its intended audience—new college instructors, including instruction librarians. It pulls together many design strategies and ideas that you can apply to instruction immediately. While more seasoned librarians may find little new pedagogical insight, the book may still have a place in refreshing one's instruction toolbox and, more importantly, inspiring instructors to focus on *who* they are teaching so that *what* they teach will actually stick. However, if you are looking for a book with original research, or an in-depth look at pedagogy, then this may not be the book for you.

References

Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do* (Professional development collection). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Eng, N. (2017). *Teaching college: The ultimate guide to lecturing, presenting, and engaging students*. New York: Norman Eng