5 Things You Should Read About
Asset-Based Teaching

2018

THE SERIES
The five things we recommend are intended to be eclectic and thought-provoking. They may be journal articles, blog posts, podcasts, interviews, reports, or just about anything else that we think is important to read, watch, or hear about this topic. For the general concept, this series is deeply indebted to the EDUCAUSE "7 Things You Should Know About..." reports.

THE TOPIC
Asset-based teaching seeks to unlock students' potential by focusing on their talents. Also known as strengths-based teaching, this approach contrasts with the more common deficit-based style of teaching which highlights students' inadequacies. By building on strengths students already possess, asset-based teaching seeks to create lifelong learners who are confident in their abilities to master new skills. The book, articles, and online tutorial that follow were chosen to help familiarize library professionals with this approach to instruction and provide tools to incorporate into their teaching. For interested readers, related topics include psychologist Carol Dweck's research on *growth mindset* and Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez's articles on *funds of knowledge*.

1. **Chávez, Alicia Fedelina, and Susan Diana Longerbeam. 2016.** *Teaching across Cultural Strengths: A Guide to Balancing Integrated and Individuated Cultural Frameworks in College Teaching.* **Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.**

   Chávez and Longerbeam show how the current culture of college teaching is based on a Western model of knowledge as compartmentalized, linear, and contextually independent, and argue for a model that approaches learning and knowledge as interconnected and contextually dependent. The authors round out these pedagogical approaches by focusing on strengths-based and culturally relevant teaching styles which may better serve an ethnically and culturally diverse student body. The collection grows from there as it describes the rewards, dilemmas, and challenges of teaching across cultural frameworks; applies cultural introspection and strengths-based pedagogies to teaching and learning; and offers case studies from faculty. Librarians will find this book helpful in challenging their cultural assumptions about pedagogy, defining strengths-based teaching, and considering new frameworks in which to help more students succeed in their information literacy courses or sessions. **Approximate reading time: 2-4 hours**

2. **Krutkowski, Sebastian. 2017. "A Strengths-Based Approach to Widening Participation Students in Higher Education."** *Reference Services Review* **45 (2): 227-241. https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-10-2016-0070.**

   Krutkowski discusses ways in which libraries can support "widening participation" students, i.e., those coming from underrepresented and underprivileged backgrounds, by shifting to a strengths-based approach to pedagogy. This article presents the case of GSM London, a higher education provider in the UK that has launched a strengths-based approach across the curriculum. The article offers an alternate view of "widening participation" students as each having unique strengths that they bring to the classroom. When focusing on perceived gaps and weaknesses, any strengths and additional skills the student may have are neglected; teaching to deficits rather than strengths is not only ineffective but may result in a model that "crushes student aspirations" (229). Krutkowski highlights how a strengths-based model could influence information literacy instruction. One of his key recommendations entails aligning library instruction to the principles of strengths-based education via a curriculum mapping exercise in order to equip students with both a skill set and a mindset that support transferable, lifelong learning. **Approximate reading time: 30 minutes**

3. **Lopez, Shane J., and Michelle C. Louis. 2009. "The Principles of Strengths-Based Education."** *Journal of College and Character* **10 (4). https://doi.org/10.2202/1940-1639.1041.**

The authors define strengths-based education by describing five educational principles derived from social sciences research: 1) measurement of student characteristics, including strengths assessment; 2) individualization that considers and acts upon students' individual strengths by offering personalized learning options; 3) networking that supports the development of student strengths; 4) deliberate application of knowledge about individuals' strengths in and beyond classroom activities; and 5) intentional development of strengths in a variety of settings. The authors also discuss assessment measures commonly used on college campuses. **Open Access**. **Approximate reading time: 20 minutes**

4. **Morrison, Kim L. 2017. "Informed Asset-Based Pedagogy: Coming Correct, Counter-Stories from an Information Literacy Classroom."** *Library Trends* **66 (2): 176-218. https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2017.0034.**

Morrison's article is a forward-thinking work about using asset-based pedagogy to make information literacy-instruction more relevant and meaningful to community college students. The article is not structured in a traditional format, but instead uses an autoethnographical approach in the first-person. Marginalized groups on campus, such as first-generation students, are typically considered at a disadvantage because they lack the necessary information and an experienced network to navigate the demands of higher education. Morrison's approach instead focuses on acknowledging and incorporating the assets that students already bring to the classroom via their personal lived experiences, families, and cultural wealth. Since she shares her own experience as a first-generation college student, her students feel safe sharing their similar backgrounds and educational experiences, resulting in the deconstruction of the traditional classroom hierarchy so that both instructor and students can learn from each other. Students learn that their experiences, culture, race, and gender are assets that add value to the classroom. Morrison's study was conducted through conversations with her students, classroom observations, and the examination of student work. The findings show positive student responses; they were eager to do more research because they felt they had something to bring to the experience. This article is a must-read for librarians interested in critical information literacy and using asset-based pedagogy to improve student engagement and learning. **Approximate reading time: 90 minutes**

5. **The University of Memphis. 2018. "Module 4 - Asset Based Community Engagement." Engaged Scholarship Online Modules***.* **Last modified January 5, 2018. http://www.memphis.edu/ess/module4/index.php.**

This online tutorial, particularly the page titled "Comparison Between Asset and Deficit Based Approaches," gives a quick and useful overview of major differences between asset-based and deficit-based approaches to working with communities. A useful starting point for communities of practice and professional development groups, this module includes accessible examples of how asset and deficit approaches work in practice and considers the criticisms and benefits of an asset-based approach. Short reflection prompts are woven throughout the tutorial and could be used as conversation starters or for individual reflection. While these modules were created with community engagement professionals in mind, the concepts translate well to the library profession and instruction or public services professionals in particular. **Approximate reading time: 10 minutes**

If you have comments or questions about the "5 Things" publications, please contact the current IS Research and Scholarship Committee Chair.