Problem-based Learning for Information Literacy in Japanese Studies
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Introduction

The library instruction session outlined here is designed for advanced Japanese language learners and beginning graduate students in Japanese studies. The teaching technique on which it is based is PBL, or "Problem-Based Learning." The PBL approach is very different from that used in much of the bibliographic instruction going on in libraries. Rather than a "show and tell" of a long list of print and/or electronic resources, it is structured around a problem, which is given to the participants to solve. The participants in PBL classes generally work in groups, making this approach especially well suited to a situation in which participants have differing levels of Japanese.

The PBL approach lends itself to the goal of information literacy. It is designed to improve the ability of students to find and evaluate information and stresses the development of critical thinking skills. It is ideal for teaching the research process, as students interpret the problem, develop strategies for the necessary research, assess the usefulness of their results, and brainstorm new directions. It requires them to formulate a conclusion or answer that addresses the research problem. All of this activity – supplemented by concrete instruction about how to effectively use the research tools at hand – educates participants in a way that reinforces information literacy goals.

Information literacy standards as defined by ACRL include a broad array of competencies. A PBL session such as the one introduced here cannot adequately address all of the standards. It is only one part of what should be a reinforcing set of instructional opportunities available in the library and classroom. This session addresses many elements in the first three ACRL standards but does not cover the last two in much depth. Nevertheless, it is one start for students to learn information competencies and begin to appreciate the nuances of critical thinking about information when that information is produced in a cultural, social, and political context about which they may not have complete understanding.

The Problem

You are a Teaching Assistant in a course for undergraduates and graduate students in Japanese history. In class, a student working on the Nanjing Massacre for her term paper comments that she found a good English language web site with a revisionist agenda that questioned whether a "massacre" did, indeed, occur. You need to find out more about the site, investigate the people and/or organizations involved in its production, and evaluate what you have learned in order to provide more information to your students next week.

Tasks

Task 1

Go to the site recommended by the student. Be prepared to summarize the content of this English site and the associated Japanese language site. Explain as much as you can about the ideological slant of the information in these sites.

Task 2

List the names of the people and organizations most prominently featured in the two web sites. Investigate these individuals and their organizations in order to help you assess:

1. The authoritativeness of the information appearing in the web sites: Who are the individuals responsible for the web site content? Are they qualified to be addressing the issues under discussion?
2. The extent to which these individuals and organizations are influential in Japan: Do their views reach a wide audience? What types of media publish their views? How available are their publications in Japan?
3. The background and history of these organizations: What sources would you recommend to someone researching this problem?

Task 3

Identify individuals and organizations with opposing points of view. Where do they publish and how influential and authoritative are they?

Research Sources: Task 1

ABC of Modern Japanese History
    http://www.jiyuu-shikan.org/e/index.html

教科書が教えない歴史
    http://www.jiyuu-shikan.org/index.html

Research Sources: Tasks 2 and 3

Periodical Indexes – English language

    Academic Search or equivalent (What names and key concepts will you search?)
    Web of Science
    Subject indexes (Asian studies, history, other?)

MagazinePlus
雑誌記事索引 (NDL)
大宅壮一文庫 WEB－OYA

Issues & Exercises
- Romanization and word division (for example, *jiyū shugi* OR *jiyūshugi*?)
- Ambiguity of names (wide variety of English language translations for the main organizations under consideration)
- Identification of concepts associated with this problem (E & J)
- Difference between searching indexes with and without controlled vocabulary
- Dealing with the unknown: how to assess unfamiliar Japanese journal and periodical titles
- Free versus fee-based indexes

Bibliographic Utilities

WorldCat (OCLC)
Eureka (RLIN)
Webcat (NII)

Issues & Excercies
- Comparison of subject searching in these national level union catalogs
- Differences between WorldCat and Eureka
- Uses of Webcat & Webcat Plus searching features

Online Bookstores

Amazon.com.jp
Book1 (and TRC's Book Portal)

Issues & Exercises
- Comparison with bibliographic utility search results
- Uses for author information

Japanese Library Catalogs

National Diet Library　国立国会図書館
Tokyo Metropolitan Library　東京都立中央図書館
Waseda University Library　早稲田大学図書館

Issues & Exercises
- Nature of materials in various types of libraries

<u>Websites</u>

       PAIR
       Asian Studies WWW Virtual Library

Issues & Exercises
- Search engines versus metadata

Addressing the Standards

       The participants in this session work in groups to research the problem under discussion. They must summarize their results at the end, having used approximately 1.5 hours to work on the tasks outlined. The information literacy standards addressed include:

Standard One, Parts 1,2, and 4
       While the problem is articulated for them, the students are required to confer, develop questions and research strategies, and brainstorm the key concepts and search terms. They need to think about potential information sources and distinguish primary and secondary resources.

Standard Two, Parts 1,2, 3, and 4
       The students need to develop expertise in searching using keywords, synonyms, and controlled vocabulary in both E & J. They need to review the information obtained and evaluate it to refine their research strategy.

Standard Three, Part 2
       The students are called on to think critically about the information they retrieve and develop sensitivity to the fact that the cultural context for the production of the information is different. They learn how to compensate for their lack of complete knowledge about this context.

Standard Five, Parts 2 and 4
       The students develop an understanding of the information environment – the difference between free and fee-based resources, copyright issues, etc.