Kim Clarke's Teaching Philosophy
Librarians, Archivists and Curators Teaching Award

My philosophy is to **teach students what they *need* to know and to explain *why* they need to know it.** An important qualifier is that I teach them what they need to know *in that moment* in accordance with their academic work, either to complete an assignment or to meet the course unit's learning outcomes.

I developed the "teach students what they need to know" portion of my philosophy in 2002, when designing my first Advanced Legal Research (ALR) course. I was working at a lower ranked American law school that proudly touted they graduated "practice-ready" lawyers. Few graduates were hired at firms with law librarians who could assist associates with their research projects, requiring them to be self-sufficient. The practice-ready perspective resonated with me as I was teaching a skills-based course and I determined that my course learning outcomes would be to ensure the students gained the skills they needed to conduct research in practice.

This was a significant change for me as I had previously worked at a Top 50 law school whose students competed for placement at national and large regional law firms, most of whom had in-house libraries. When I considered the topics we covered in ALR at my previous law school and at other schools (according to the syllabi colleagues shared with me) I realized that several topics were somewhat esoteric, of interest to librarians but without a solid connection with today's practice of law. By eliminating these "nice to know" topics, I was able to free up class time to introduce daily hands-on exercises to develop their practice-based skills.

Focusing my instruction on what students need to know *at that time* assists me in maintaining their attention even though the subject matter may be a bit dry or complex. This is especially critical in my instruction sessions as I only have 30-60 minutes in the class to provide them with the information they need to complete their assignment or research paper. This requires me to sift through voluminous amounts of information regarding legal resources and research techniques to hone in on materials that will assist this group of learners at this time.

I believe that emphasizing why the course materials are relevant to students, illustrating how the skills they are developing will assist them in the future, increases the effectiveness of my instruction. Research shows that students find it difficult to independently transfer skills learned in one context (the classroom) with a dissimilar context (working at a law firm or applying new skills to an assignment).[1] We must help students make appropriate "connections between the knowledge and skills they possess and new contexts in which those skills apply."[2] In ALR, I do this by using practice-based scenario questions on my assignments, referring to practical contexts in class, and introducing discussion questions to encouraged students to contemplate how to use the materials in practice. For example, my query "when will you use scholarly law review articles in practice?" facilitates a comparison over the significant differences between using articles in law school and practice.

Explicitly explaining why and how the information in my non-Law instruction sessions aligns with their assignment is critical to increase their comfort using legal resources. This assignment will

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[1] Susan M Ambrose, *How Learning Works: Seven Research-based Principles for Smart Teaching* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010) at 109.
[2] *Ibid* at 112.

be the first time the majority of these students will search be using legal databases and analyzing legal materials, and it is unreasonable, in my opinion, to believe they can do so independently. I use a variety of techniques to help students understand the relevance of the materials I am discussing to their assignment, including overlaying screen captures of assignment questions with text boxes and arrows identifying the type of materials they should use to answer portions of the question.