Formulas for Reflection

Using Safiya Umoja Noble’s *Algorithm of Oppression* to engage student learners

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Background
Common ground

- Working and communication styles
- Interest in big questions
- Desire to engage in new ways with students
The Honors Program

- 500 active students
- Pillars of critical thinking and interdisciplinary learning
- “Honors in practice” points
Book Labs by the numbers

- 1 book
- 1-2 faculty
- 5 students
- 4 x 1-hour meetings
- 2-page written reflection
Algorithms of Oppression
by Safiya Umoja Noble
The book

- Implications of algorithmic discrimination and tech bias
- Challenges ideas of neutrality
- Interdisciplinary Black Feminist Technology Studies
Where other scholars have problematized Google Search in terms of its lack of neutrality and prioritization of its own commercial interests, my critiques aim to explicitly address racist and sexist bias in search, fueled by neoliberal technology policy over the past thirty years.
Our rationale

- Multi-disciplinary appeal
- Connects to University and Honors mission statements
- Insight from different areas of LIS
- Learning through collaboration, dialogue, and deep reading
Logistics

- Majors in Computer Science, Biology, Math, Theater
- Student-driven discussion
- PROCESS model
  - Participation
  - Respect
  - Ouch/Oops
  - Confidentiality
  - Empathy
  - Step Up
  - Step Back
Logistics

- Front-loaded schedule:
  - Introduction & Ch. 1 – Theory and thesis
  - Ch. 2, 3, & 4 – Searching examples
  - Ch. 5 & 6 – Looking toward the future
  - Conclusion & Epilogue – Case study and wrap up
- Final session focused on reflection paper prompts
How did it go?

What they said:
- Exposed to new material/ideas
- Gained new perspective
- Noticed lack of diversity in group
How did it go?

What they wrote:
- Communities engage with the internet differently
- Connections to their intended fields
- Deeper sense of how search is structured
- Privacy as a concern
How did it go?

- What we observed:
  - Focused on examples to understand thesis
  - Challenge shifting from personal perspective to critical evaluation
Reflections on the Process
Structure of Book Labs

- Unknown quantities (book + students)
- Need for a structured learning environment
- Limited room for additional activities/exercises
- Desire for weekly synthesis beyond discussion
Facilitating discussions

- Introducing a seminar format
- Discussion in spaces that have no ready answers
- Narrate vs. nurture the discussion
As many teaching librarians know, knowledge is socially constructed, which is why we require so many of our students to work in teams or small groups. Why wouldn’t we use that same model of learning for ourselves?

Teachers who collaborate build a shared repository of knowledge and inquiry that can actually transform the way they teach.

“Matlin & Carr (2014), p. 65 & 63
Resources: On librarian collaboration


Resources: To supplement Noble’s book

- Safiya Umoja Noble speaking about her work:
  - Talk at re:publica 2018: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7yFysTBpAo
  - Interview on PRX’s Inflection Point: https://beta.prx.org/stories/258474
THANKS!
Any questions?

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