



Evidence Summary

Information Literacy Skills: Teacher and Student Viewpoints

A review of:

Herring, James E. "A Critical Investigation of Students' and Teachers' View of the Use of Information Literacy Skills in School Assignments." *School Library Media Research* 9 (2006). 14 May 2007
<<http://ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/slmrb/slmrcontents/volume9/informationliteracy.htm>>.

Reviewed by:

Julie Stephens
Media Specialist, Calhoun Educational Complex
Calhoun, Georgia, United States of America
E-mail: stephensj@calhounschools.org

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Abstract

Objective – To examine student and teacher views of information literacy skills in school assignments in order to determine: 1) To what extent did students value the use of a research model booklet (PLUS)? 2) How confident were the students about doing a good assignment and did the PLUS booklet affect their confidence? 3) What benefits and limitations did students identify from individual brainstorming and concept mapping in relation to learning more about their topic and producing a good assignment? 4) To what extent did students see value in doing preliminary reading to revise their initial keywords and concept maps? 5) What reading and note-taking strategies did students adopt when using print and electronic resources? 6) To what

extent (and why) did students prefer to use electronic rather than print resources? 7) What are the implications for teachers and school library media specialists (SLMS)?

Design – Qualitative, action research; collaborative inquiry.

Setting – Ripon Grammar School, Yorkshire, United Kingdom (high school/co-educational).

Subjects – Fifty-two students in the second year of high school (year 8) enrolled in a science class studying sound technology; the school library media specialist (SLMS); science teachers.

Methods – Students in this study had previously been taught a variety of

information skills and had been introduced to a research model called PLUS (Purpose, Location, Use, Self-Evaluation). Students were given a PLUS model booklet, were required to select a topic in the area of sound technology, and were expected to do brainstorming and concept mapping and to produce a 600-word essay. After the assignment was completed, three methods of data collection were employed to determine students' and teachers' views: 1) post-assignment questionnaire 2) group interviews with students and teachers 3) semi-structured interview with the school librarian.

Main results – Responses indicated that students were “mostly” satisfied with the use of the PLUS model, although there were 18 students who did not respond to questions regarding the use of the booklet. It was also clear from the questionnaire that the majority of the students did not feel confident in their abilities to produce a satisfactory assignment prior to beginning the research; however, 48% of the students indicated that the PLUS booklet made them more confident. A comparable number of students said the booklet had no effect on their confidence and one student said it made them less confident.

Students responded very positively about the use of individual brainstorming and concept mapping as a way to organize and focus on their topic. (There was a split between those who felt a written concept map was useful and those who felt a mental concept map was just as helpful.) The majority of students felt that group brainstorming was helpful, while a few indicated the behavior of other students during group brainstorming was a hindrance.

Questions about preliminary reading were not open-ended but were multiple choice. There was no response to indicate *whether*

the preliminary reading was helpful or not, but rather *how* it was helpful. Most students indicated it had helped to identify the right keywords for further research and it helped them in finding the right resources.

Students were questioned on the format of their note-taking. Sixty-five per cent preferred to hand write their notes in a notebook; fifteen per cent preferred to take notes electronically in some type of word processing program; twelve per cent preferred to cut and paste into a word processor; and eight per cent preferred “other methods.” Note-taking styles ranged from bulleted lists to spider diagrams, to using headings with categorized notes.

When asked to indicate the percentage of information derived from Web sites versus information from books and journals, responses showed that over 65.5 % of the information came from web sites while only 35.5 % came from print material. When asked why, students responded that Web sites were easier to read, more useful, easier to use, more interesting, faster to use, had more pictures, and could be accessed from home. Students who indicated a preference for print material identified reasons such as not trusting Web sites and slow access.

Interviews with the teachers and the school librarian indicated agreement that the benefits of using the PLUS model were: it kept students from rushing into the assignment; it allowed for better thinking and analytical skills; it helped students improve their note-taking skills; and students were transferring skills.

In the interviews, teachers were very positive concerning the collaborative efforts of the school librarian. Responses from the SLMS's focused on how to improve student use of resources, and concern that teachers and librarians should engage students in activities that foster critical thinking.

Conclusion – The study suggested that students are capable of reflecting on their use of information literacy skills. It also indicated that students saw the value in brainstorming, concept mapping, and the use of a research model such as the PLUS booklet, even though these strategies did not necessarily suit the learning styles of all students. There was overwhelming evidence that students prefer electronic resources over print resources and reasons why they prefer electronic resources were articulated. Implications for teachers and school library media specialists include: collaboration, the importance of seeking and analyzing student feedback, examining transfer of information literacy skills across subjects, and exploring student use of print and electronic resources.

Commentary

The topic of this research is significant and of value to anyone working with students, such as teachers and school librarians. All charts, graphs and questionnaires were included and were appropriate and clear. There was not much explanation of the PLUS model beyond a simple flowchart and a definition of each component (an example of the booklet the students had “in hand” would have been helpful). An extensive review of literature was included. This particular study was very limited in that it

only involved a small number of students in one age group, at one school involved with one assignment. However, student responses were probably very typical and could have been the same in a larger, more varied group of subjects. Herring was very limited in his explanation of the content of the project (he did note that his research design was qualitative rather than quantitative, but more description of the actual process would have been beneficial.) Little information was given as to how much time was spent on the project, how much actual instruction in research skills was delivered by the teachers and/or media specialist, and how the results of this one assignment compared to previous assignments. Future research could examine the use of information literacy skills across a range of ages and curriculum areas and could compare the use of the PLUS model to research done without the model or with an alternative research model. The outcomes of this research were clearly stated. These findings indicate that some students definitely benefit from the use of research models such as the PLUS model used in this study. The fact the students rely so heavily on, and prefer electronic resources, also has definite implications for the school media specialist, the technology teacher and the classroom teacher as they design and implement learning experiences and assessments.