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ABSTRACT

First-year composition courses (particularly the semester course devoted to exposition, argumentation, and research) were the site at Western Carolina University for an alliance between professors and librarians as they attempted to integrate information literacy. Librarians developed six modules to teach "The Big Six Skills Approach to Information Problem Solving": (1) task definition, (2) information seeking strategies, (3) locating and accessing information, (4) using information, (5) synthesis (organizing information from multiple sources and presenting the information); and (6) evaluation. Each librarian was assigned to a cluster group of 4 or 5 English composition instructors, allowing English instructors to identify the most logical sequence for the skills to be presented in their class as well as to inform the librarians of specific paper assignments. Examples use the first three information skills to show how they were integrated into courses, as librarians, in discussion with individual instructors, determined the actual assignments that would allow the students to practice the literacy skill, the topics most applicable to the papers students were required to write, and the time needed for instruction. (Guidelines for evaluating web sites are attached.) (SR)

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"Western Carolina University's Model of Integrating Information Literacy:  
Partnering the First Year Composition Instructor, Students and  
a Personal Librarian"  
by Mary Warner

The story begins with Mary's invitation in fall 1996 to join a group of Western Carolina University's reference librarians in their efforts to integrate information literacy campus-wide. For Mary, at this point information literacy was an abstraction, a jargon word of the library professionals. Given the basic description of the information literate person as one who is able to

recognize the need for information; formulate questions based on information needs; identify potential sources of information; develop successful search strategies; access sources of information, including computer-based and from other technologies; evaluate information; organize information for practical application; integrate new information into an existing body of knowledge; and use information in critical thinking and problem solving (Doyle)

the obvious match between the objectives for first-year composition instruction and this new level of library skills orientation becomes clear.

Indeed, librarians as experts in accessing information have been in the first wave of technology's information explosion; simultaneously, they need a forum providing the context for integration and practice of the skills demanded by this new literacy. Amy Kautzman, head reference librarian at Lamont Library, Harvard, identifies the need for alliance of librarians and composition instructors as a "natural alliance" saying:

The librarian's speciality is, of course, helping the student learn to make the leap from simple information literacy to critical thinking. We know it can be amazingly easy to develop a bibliography of books and periodicals

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on a topic. What is not easy is the evaluation of those sheaves of citations. While some classroom teachers discuss specialized resources and academically solid, peer-reviewed journals, many do not. It is extremely difficult to stay on top of new literature and many academics--faculty and librarians alike--suffer from "information anxiety," in part because they are now more periodicals and books than ever before. (62)

Even without knowledge of Kautzman's suggested alliance, Mary, with her perspective as an English professor who frequently teaches first-year composition as well as Methods of Teaching Composition for English Education majors, quickly identified first-year composition courses, particularly the semester course devoted to exposition, argumentation, and research, as the ideal site for an alliance of composition instructors, students and, as we call them at Western Carolina, "personal librarians." These personal librarians serve as guides for moving information to knowledge as aptly described by Lenox and Walker, "Yet, by itself, information is not knowledge; it is bits of data that we gather by reading, observation or hearsay. To become knowledge, information must be filtered through our experiences and applied to our lives" (58).

The librarians developed a series of modules, several presented via power-point, to teach what Eisenberg and Berkowitz in "The Big Six Skills Approach to Information Problem Solving" identify as "the big six." Each librarian was assigned to a cluster group of four or five English composition instructors, allowing English instructors to identify the most logical sequence for librarians to present the six skills as well as to inform the librarians of specific paper assignments. Knowing, for example, that Mary was having students prepare a proposal paper on the topic of censorship, the personal librarian brought a selection of books that had been banned by various

constituencies. The topic search work in the information literacy class could then use censorship as the model during the hands-on activities.

Western Carolina University also has the advantage of having five electronic classrooms (as of March 30, 1998, a sixth classroom is available, the University library now having its own electronic classroom) allowing for multi-media presentations and providing each student with access to a computer that has the essential network capabilities for student practice with the information literacy competencies.

The first skill, Task Definition involves defining the information problem and identifying the information needed to complete the task. Each librarian, in discussion with individual instructors, could determine the actual assignments that would allow the students to practice the literacy skill, could determine the topics most applicable to the papers students were required to write, and could determine the time needed for instruction. Since each librarian has a cluster of composition instructors and classes with whom to work, it is significant that the information literacy instruction is integrated concisely; sometimes the lesson is shorter than one class period.

An example of activities in Module One designed for Task Definition include the following. Students might be given a brief entry on "Hiawatha" from an encyclopedia and asked to complete these tasks:

1. After reading this article, underline or highlight 10 key words or concepts related to Hiawatha's life. (ex. Mohawk River Valley, NY; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)
2. List 3 ideas for focusing a paper on this topic. (ex. Hiawatha's real life vs. that depicted in the poem)
3. For each focus, what kinds of information would you search for? (ex. Chippewa legends)

During the work with this first skill of task definition, the librarians integrated knowledge about the use of Britannica On-Line, emphasizing one of

the ways encyclopedias are useful for research in college course work. Mary's first paper on a topic related to Language led Betsy Whitley, Mary's personal librarian, to guide students through Britannica On-Line topics like Ebonics and Rastafarianism. Since teaching the importance of background reading was also a component of this first module, it worked well to have the librarians discuss the value of special topic encyclopedias, giving a more complete introduction to these references.

What should become evident is that the information literacy skills and their integration are not limited in any way to simply learning how to use the World Wide Web. In fact, the term "skills" can be misleading. Kautzman uses "information competence" signaling the "ability to access, evaluate, and apply information (62). Another inherent danger is that students can become dependent solely on electronic sources, missing the unique value of "paper resources" and reference works found only in libraries. Western's personal librarians strive to include a range of references in their information literacy modules.

The second of the "big six skills" deals with Information Seeking Strategies and includes elements such as learning to brainstorm all possible sources and to select the best sources. As librarians met with classes for "hands-on" experience of this skill, the primary focus was on using Topcat, Western Carolina University's on-line catalog. Students can access Topcat through the ResNet and thus can get to the library without leaving their dorm rooms, but without instruction on how to navigate the network, they could not enjoy the convenience. Accessing Topcat via Telnet (or as of Spring 1998 via Netscape Communicator) brought students to contact with InfoTrac, First Search, and the accompanying information competencies needed for finding periodicals, journals and newspaper articles. Tangential to use of InfoTrac,

ERIC or other data bases, is the necessity for careful reading and following of directions to navigate the information source. One of the greatest barriers students face is knowing how to move from one screen to the next, and the directions given are specific to each data base; again the need is for students to develop the critical thinking skills to read carefully whether that be on the computer or in a text.

Locating and Accessing Information is the third of the "big six skills." This skill involves the knowledge needed to locate sources as well as the ability to find information within a source. Among the competencies needed with locating and accessing information is the ability to apply Boolean logic as students do key word or subject searches. In the broader context of this competency is the evaluation of sources, specifically Web sites. Western's personal librarians gave composition instructors a valuable aid in Ithaca College Library's Web site:

<http://www.ithaca.edu/library/Training/ICYouSee.html>.

This excellent information literacy site provides guidelines for such evaluation, including five suggestions for examining Web pages; these guidelines are included on the page entitled, "T is for Thinking." By accessing the Web address given, composition teachers can find the helps needed for a hands-on lesson involving student analysis, using the five guidelines, of several different Web sites.

Kautzman also provides, in the form of questions, key aspects students need to address while selecting research sources. Her questions include

1. Why should I read this piece of literature?
2. What is the full title and year of publication?
3. Who are the author(s) and published?
4. What is included in the table of contents or headings?
5. Are there any features, such as an index, bibliography,

- glossary, or illustrations?
6. What are the intention and scope as indicated by the preface or introduction or an abstract?
  7. Is the language and approach suitable to my level?
  8. What are my questions for this work?
  9. Does it appear to address my questions?
  10. Is the conclusion relevant to my interests?

(62-63)

These questions can assist students in the critical analysis of sources as well as in determining the suitability of the source and its applicability to their topic. There is also remarkable similarity in the evaluation questions designed by Western's librarians to assess their effectiveness with integrating the literacy competencies in the composition curricula. Betsy Whitley, head reference librarian offered the following statements as a means for evaluating the specific impact of personal librarians' teaching in the English 102 classes:

When researching a topic

I am able to define and focus my information need.

I am able to identify potential sources of information.

I am able to find these sources of information.

I am able to extract relevant information from these sources.

I am able to evaluate my sources and choose appropriate sources of information.

I am able to organize and communicate this information.

Whitley did question whether the final two statements would actually be the responsibility of the composition instructors rather than the librarians. In any case, the literacy competencies identified in the final two statements do parallel that final three skills of Eisenberg and Berkowitz's "big six." As they describe the skills, the fourth is Use of Information-- engaging in the source and extracting relevant information; the fifth, Synthesis--organizing information from multiple sources and presenting the information; and the

sixth, Evaluation--judging the process (efficiency) and judging the product (effectiveness).

Hannelore Rader in *Reference Services Review* summarizes well the advantages of the successfully integrated information literacy competencies.

Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organized, how to find information, and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning because they can always find the information for any task or decision at hand.

Western Carolina's partnering of composition instructor, first year composition students and a personal librarian has begun this development of information literate people. The task ahead looms large, however, given the information explosion and its rapid growth. As with all aspects of the writing process, information literacy is another area which can only benefit from more integration across disciplines and curriculum. The alliance of librarians and composition instructors clearly creates a foundation for developing information literacy.

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# *T is for Thinking*

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*Never be afraid to sit awhile and think. -- Lorraine Hansberry*

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For fun and games and pretty pictures, the Web is fine. But is the Web a good research tool? The answer is yes, if you are careful. You must carefully evaluate the information you are looking at. Almost anyone can put up almost anything on the Web. It is up to you to judge what is valuable and reliable and weed out the rest.

Consider the following five suggestions when examining web pages.

1. Make sure you are in the right place. Why are you using the Web? Don't use the Web because its fun and easy; use it when it is the appropriate source for the information you are seeking. An hour on the Web may not answer a question that you could find within two minutes of picking up a reference book. This is not to say there aren't useful Web sources.
2. When in doubt, doubt. It makes some difference whether you are reading a book or magazine or viewing a Web page, but always be skeptical of what you read. Books and magazines have been edited, and a company or association took the time and money to publish them--this is not necessarily so for the Web. Accuracy is not always easy to detect, so test one source against another. Try to differentiate fact from opinion. Look for ambiguity and manipulative reasoning and bias. Examine assumptions, including and perhaps especially, your own.
3. Consider the source. Who are the authors of the Web page? What gives them their expertise? By what authority do they write? Have the authors indicated their research methods or provided any supportive evidence for their conclusions? Have they provided a means to contact them? Does an agency, company, university, etc. sponsor the page? What do you know about it?
4. Know what's happening. Identify the purpose of the Web Page. Is the main purpose to inform, to persuade, or to sell you something? If you know the motive behind the page's creation, you can better judge its content.
5. Look at details. Although great ideas and great Web design are not necessarily linked, internal clues can tell you much about a Web page. Check for the obvious things, such as good grammar and correct spelling. Note the depth of the material presented. When was the Web item last revised, and how up-to-date are the links? What kind of sources are linked? Are the links evaluated or annotated in any way? Graphics may be great, but do they serve any purpose other than decoration? Just as a magazine with many color advertisements may have a different purpose than a scholarly journal with no illustrations, a Web site with mirthful color and slickness may not be primarily a research site.

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