

To Google or Not to Google

That is the question!

(Previously titled: Information Literacy for Today's Students)

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For both teachers and students, information literacy and the growing dependence on the internet is a significant issue for today's students. Google is the name of a company that created an internet search engine for finding information on any topic a person can imagine. As the popularity of this type of search has exploded, the term "google" has been transformed into a verb referring to a web based search for information, such as "I will google it" or "I googled him."

Along with the over-dependence on internet searches, many parents are concerned about the safety of their students. Online predators, pornographic websites, and online scams are just a few of the dangers a student may encounter while searching the web. Avoiding the internet as a research tool isn't the answer. Still, parents should put safeguards in place while at the same time teaching students the research skills they need to make the internet an asset.



The addition of internet resources to the field of information literacy is unavoidable and largely positive. However, with this new dimension come many concerns about the quality of information and the student's skills in gathering and evaluating it that need to be addressed. As

Dr. David Hopper (2004) said, “Serious scholarship in a technology empowered world calls for learners to develop new strengths in information literacy” (p. 5). Teachers and parents are facing new challenges in teaching and motivating students to incorporate a variety of sources in their research projects.

The Challenge

According to the National Forum on Information Literacy (n.d.), “Information Literacy is defined as the ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand” (Home page). The challenge, then, is in creating an integrated system that utilizes both online resources and more traditional offline resources such as library searches, archives, interviews, etc. in the research process.

Students must be equipped with the skills necessary to navigate the digital information retrieval systems as well as the libraries and archives, and evaluate the information they find in both. Additionally, they must learn when an internet search provides the necessary resources and when it’s time to look for resources beyond Google. To this end, many schools and universities have implemented information literacy classes, tutorials, or incorporated research skill practice into their programs in order to help students attain a certain level of competency.

Internet versus Library

Time and location are key factors in the choice between internet and library research. The technology that connects students with the vast information resources of the internet provides opportunities for students to learn about a myriad of topics with ease.



The National Forum on Information Literacy (n.d.) stated, “Information is expanding at an unprecedented rate, and enormously rapid strides are being made in technology for storing,



organizing, and accessing the ever-growing tidal wave of information” (Home page). This information deluge has made quality resources so available to any web-surfer that there is little need for traditional research methods. Or at least the majority of students think so. As Hopper (2004) noted, many students already believe all of the world’s information is available on the internet. Many educators

fear that the skills of library research will become a lost art.

The issue for parents and teachers becomes how to equip their students with the knowledge and critical thinking skills to assess the information they find, and how to motivate them to take the extra steps to reach beyond a Google search. When students believe there is no other information, or at least no *better* information, available offline, they will not make the effort to find it. Searching, to them, is a simple matter of typing in the right keywords. However, this limited method does not always yield quality results.

Quality and Quantity

With the ability of internet search engines to produce millions of results on a single query in a matter of seconds, the social desire for instant gratification is satisfied. But at what cost? According to study of college students conducted by Weiner (2010), “The results of the study suggest that many college students view their educational experience as one of ‘satisficing’ — finding just enough information that is ‘good enough’ to complete course assignments. They

miss opportunities that college education provides for exploration, discovery, and deep learning” (para. 3). Quantity is certainly present online, but the quality is often lacking.

In an effort to assist students in locating quality sources on the internet, various groups have created search sites of their own such as the Librarians’ Internet Index (www.lii.org), which recently merged with the Internet Public Library (www.ipl.org) to expand its collection of recommended websites. The sites located through these free services have been reviewed by librarians for accuracy, credibility, and more ensuring a level of overall quality for the site. In addition, several databases exist for cataloguing and archiving articles from various academic journals. Other websites such as Questia.com charge a fee for access to thousands of articles, journals, and books online. As more and more print resources are published electronically, the number of quality sources available via the internet is growing. Still, students must be taught how to access and search these resources to find the information they need.



Conclusion

Information literacy in the Information Age is concerned with organizing quality web resources in a way that makes them accessible to researchers while working to equip students with the knowledge and skill to utilize quality sources both online and offline. Banning or limiting internet use in the research process denies its power as an information gathering tool. Conversely, allowing students to rely solely on results from a Google search hinders their ability to gather information from a variety of sources. Students must be encouraged to take a more comprehensive view of research, conducting searches both online and offline.



Once they leave the shallow waters of Google, they will be ready to expand their educational experiences through resources they might not otherwise have noticed. In order to do this, students must know how to use the tools available for locating sources, have the critical thinking skills to evaluate them, and be persuaded that the extra effort makes a difference.

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