2-28-2018

Sharing for the Greater Good: A High School and Community College Partnership to Cultivate Information Literacy in a Rural Community

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DELIA FIELDS

Delia is the teacher librarian for secondary schools in the Hermiston School District. Covering two middle schools and the high school in her hometown, she earned her BS in Technical Journalism from Oregon State University in 1988 and was a reporter in Alaska for several years before moving into the field of education and moving back to Eastern Oregon. She received her BEd at the University of Alaska Anchorage in 1995, teaching middle school humanities for 18 years and then earning her MLS from Portland State University in 2013. She is a regional representative with the Oregon Association of School Libraries and loves helping students find that gateway author.

JACQUELYN RAY

Jackie currently serves as the Director of Library and Media Services at Blue Mountain Community College. Her interests are (for better or worse!) wide-ranging but center around student learning; her hope and goal is to help students find and cultivate their voice in their creative and/or scholarly pursuits. Jackie is also interested in the library's role in remedying social justice issues; she coordinates Oregon Humanities "Conversation Project" events at her college and she works closely with Open Education Resources (OER) efforts to support equitable access to educational materials for all students.

"Mind the gap" is a phrase heard umpteen times when riding the London Underground subway system. That same advice was heeded in eastern Oregon, where it prompted an Information Literacy (IL) collaboration project between a high school and a community college librarian who forged a "dynamic duo" in an attempt to bridge noticeable gaps in the information literacy skills of their students.

Students in both high school and college struggle with aspects of information literacy. These knowledge and habit "gaps" are wide ranging—from initial question asking, to entering the scholarly conversation and finding their voice, to evaluating the myriad resources at their fingertips to seeking help when needed. Narrowing these gaps is a daunting task, but the desire to address these critical needs for our students is what prompted Delia Fields, Hermiston High School librarian, and Jacquelyn (Jackie) Ray, Director of Library and Media Services at Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC), to join forces this past year.

We received a generous School/Academic Librarian Collaboration Scholarship from ACRL-Oregon. With the support of these scholarship funds, we were able to follow through on our idea to bridge the IL gaps we noticed in our student populations. Our strategy was to start with classroom teachers at Hermiston High School who taught regular high school classes as well as students enrolled in BMCC's Early College Credit program. Together, we planned and presented a series of workshops to train local high school faculty on best practices in incorporating IL into their assignments. Our other goal in this work was to create a learning community that could sustain conversations and interest in IL after the workshop series ended. This idea was borrowed from a successful initiative led by Michele Burke at Chemeketa Community College to support high school librarians. In northeastern Oregon, high school librarians are both rare and tasked with myriad competing duties, often stretched thin; working directly with high school faculty was essential in trying to embed a richer information literacy experience in our classrooms.

Fostering IL skills while working both as colleagues and supporters of faculty efforts to meet students' learning needs is among the fundamental duties of academic librarians. Although this may be a universal point of agreement, how to best go about fulfilling and inspiring IL in our curriculum while supporting faculty and students is a perennial task. To effectively create an IL curriculum requires us to reflect on the needs of our learners, consider our praxis, and design assessments that are inclusive of our students and faculty so that we can strengthen our capacity to provide IL in increasingly meaningful ways. Our collaboration fostered our thinking around these subjects and also provided us with an opportunity to put our ideas, research, and experience with IL learning into practice.

The idea to pursue a collaboration project emerged in fall 2016. Delia Fields approached Jackie Ray about this scholarship opportunity and the possibility of partnering in a professional development project. An early goal we identified was to gain clearer insight into the needs of both high school and college faculty in order to help students bridge the information literacy gaps. Too many students in upper-level high school classes are moving into college classes without the information literacy skills and habits that translate into successful learning (Foster, 2006, p. A36). The struggle to build these skills can be greater in rural areas, where there may be obstacles to accessing materials, alongside a diminished number of librarians able to advocate for and foster the development of information literacy skills in our schools (Gross & Latham, 2012). Our intent, in many ways, was to respond to the needs of high school teachers who kept asking, in one form or another, "What exactly is it that the college instructors need the students to be able to do when they walk into their higher education classes?" And we agreed that, in turn, the BMCC faculty had corresponding thoughts and concerns, such as, "We hope our high school teachers cover topics such as evaluating sources, plagiarism, etc. with their students before sending them to us." We also had other questions regarding IL-specific practices taking place in classrooms; learning about these was our first step upon receiving the grant award notification. We developed a

survey to gauge high school faculty understanding of IL and to also learn about their needs and expectations of student capabilities in this area. [See sidebar below.] We worked through the survey results to categorize the top needs and areas of interest expressed and designed a series of face-to-face workshops using this information.

Our face to face workshops were coined our "Information Literacy Immersion Summit Series." The IL Immersion Summit sessions were designed and marketed primarily toward Hermiston High faculty with college-bound seniors, though the invitation was opened to include any teachers whose subject area presented opportunities to conduct research with students. Conveniently, an audience was at the ready, as select faculty were allotted release time to attend our sessions as a professional development opportunity. Time allotted (not enough!) per IL Immersion Summit session was the other key factor that impacted early planning on our part, so we packed as much as we could into each session, scaling our content so that these bite-sized sessions would be not too small and not too overwhelming but just right and, "tapas-style," would add up to a well-rounded meal. Since the endeavor was technically optional for instructors, we created sessions that would engage faculty by including hands-on activities but also remained realistic in terms of time and later use. We also developed "takeaways" and an online repository (Google Docs) for later reference.

One of the early challenges of our initial presentation plan was the need to rework the approach and delivery of the sessions due to shifting attendance. Initially, it was anticipated the IL Immersion cohort would consist primarily of teacher attendees who were involved with or familiar with Early College Credit. However, attendees represented a wider variety of general subject teachers. The challenge did not prove detrimental, but it did require changes to make material relevant for additional grade bands and, in some cases, a deeper dive into discipline-specific resources.

Since this was our first collaboration project, we knew that clear communication between ourselves and our audience was paramount in order to serve the needs of the teachers and ultimately the students. To plan our IL Immersion Summit to best meet the teachers' needs, we relied on our experience and our pre-questionnaire to set a vision and structure for our sessions, with the expectation that other teacher needs would emerge as the opportunity arose during our sessions. As our sessions progressed, teachers felt comfortable explaining that they "did not know what they didn't know" when it came to IL skills and available resources being presented to them. This led to some great on-the-spot instruction and also spoke to the need to more pointedly market library resources. These open conversations also engaged faculty in discussions about their curricular needs and how the library can support their goals in meeting student learning outcomes.

Between the varied teacher audiences in attendance weekly and their background knowledge of IL skills, each session had more information to offer than there was time allotted. We had to balance "packing in as much content as we could" with what was both needed and memorable. We conferred before and after each session to adjust specifics in order to cater to the actual teacher audience in any given week. The planned presentation was still delivered in general terms; however, in the face of teacher questions and requests, one of us would jump in to demonstrate pertinent resources or review a research process to best serve that week's audience needs. Follow-up emails were sent out to further share relevant resources, tip sheets, and lesson tools. The follow-up emails were sent to all invited teachers, not just the ones who attended.

There were a total of five consecutive sessions slated for Wednesday mornings in spring 2016. Allowing for the most part only 20 minutes (though they often went over) introducing, practicing, and discussing, session content was like repeated lightning rounds. These sessions were held during what is called a Professional Learning Community (PLC) time set aside by the school district each Wednesday. The optional IL Immersion Summit was competing with a few mandatory PLC meetings. The teacher attendance varied from six to eight teachers on a slim day, to the largest group of thirteen. Each session focused on a key resource or skill area and was conducted in the high school library computer lab, where a projector allowed for interactive, follow-along, and independent participation. Invitations went out via email and an emphasis was placed on these sessions, answering the questions and requests noted in the faculty survey. Per Delia, "a marquee attraction was having Jackie there as a captive resource," so to speak, for the high school folks who wanted to foster the connection with college-level IL skills work.

Thanks to the generosity of the ACRL-Oregon grant, morning refreshments were provided during each session. As the weeks progressed, the IL Immersion Summit refreshment table became famous for its offerings and likely worked for our benefit. Each session attracted a core group of regular attendees as well as other teachers who were drawn by the stated focus for that time period.

Session 1

Survey overview, discussion of writing framework standards, resource preview
This opening session was the figurative door swinging wide open in terms of how much impact IL skills have in widely varied subject areas and the potential reach our sessions could have across the disciplines. Aside from the expected English teachers, our audience included teachers from Career Technical Education (CTE) classes who seemed as interested in how to help their students become critical consumers of information as the social studies instructors. The first session covered a review of the pre-session questionnaire and capitalized on the shared interest educators had across their disciplines. Unfolding to a learning outcomes-based discussion, our conversation transitioned to the shared goals that can be found in a comparison of the ACRL Framework and the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing espoused by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011). A discussion centered around learning outcomes successfully emphasized IL as a cross-cutting skill. Becoming aware of the variety of resources available bolstered the teachers' willingness to share experiences. This set the stage for vital discussion, learning from one another, and showcasing the cross-disciplinary impact of IL.

Session 2

Database searching and tools, advanced filtering
The precedent had been set in session 1 with both the tantalizing refreshments and (according to Delia) the presence Jackie afforded the high school teachers, giving them unfettered access to college-level research lesson queries. Limited presentation time was the only complicating factor as the sessions continued and attendance grew through positive word-of-mouth and email invitations.

Session 3

Evaluating resources (general and database)

The third session was the single 45-minute slot, and a few teachers could not stay for the full presentation, so it was chunked so that teachers who attended only part of the session would walk away with good information and later catch-up was possible with one-on-one discussion. The extended time also allowed for greater hands-on time. As teachers engaged in reviewing resources, they shared their concerns about the infringement of fake news and the increasing struggle students have in identifying credible sources, followed by their own suggestions for lessons helping students learn how to evaluate resources.

Session 4

Plagiarizing, paraphrasing, citing

Teachers of senior-level classes were the most vocal during this session. In addition to the common frustration of having students who are sorely lacking citation knowledge or skills, the session focus went toward the need for lesson support for paraphrasing as well as under-standing and teaching strategies about plagiarism.

Session 5

Requests and review

The wrap-up session, unsurprisingly, revealed ongoing needs for further IL skills support, and we are happy also to say that teachers wanted the resources offered by both of us. Some highlights include one attendee who did not appear engaged during the three sessions he attended, yet was enthusiastic in an email thank you and request for additional assistance for IL support in developing assignments and a librarian-led presentation in his classroom. This leaves room for us to inquire what could have been more beneficial for attendees.

Although no longer covered by the grant, we are highly motivated to continue this work. We received inspiring faculty comments such as, "this was extremely beneficial, every faculty member should have the opportunity to attend these sessions," and our local newspaper even felt this work was article-worthy. The next steps for us, both singularly and together, are to revisit and review the evaluative comments about the learning session and to package them in such a way to either present again in person or in conjunction with tech-nology other than Google Drive—such as Zoom, Canvas, and/or LibGuides—to provide an electronic yet interactive component both in activities and discussion. The framework of the IL Immersion Summit has been built, and we both agree that it is paramount to continue building a foundation for helping both high school and college faculty gain IL skills and construct lessons to present to their students.

References

Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the National Writing Project (NWP). (2011). Framework for success in postsecondary writing. Retrieved from http://wpacouncil.org/framework

Foster, A. L. (2006, October 27). Students fall short on 'information literacy,' educational testing service's study finds. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. p. A36.

Gross, M., & Latham, D. (2012). What's skill got to do with it?: Information literacy skills and self-views of ability among first-year college students. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology, 63*(3), 574–583. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.21681

Additional Information

The following are highlights from the project survey questions and results/answers which helped guide the School/Academic Librarian Collaboration and resultant information literacy summit. There were 21 people who responded, a mix of six college faculty and 15 high school teachers. The complete survey can be found here:
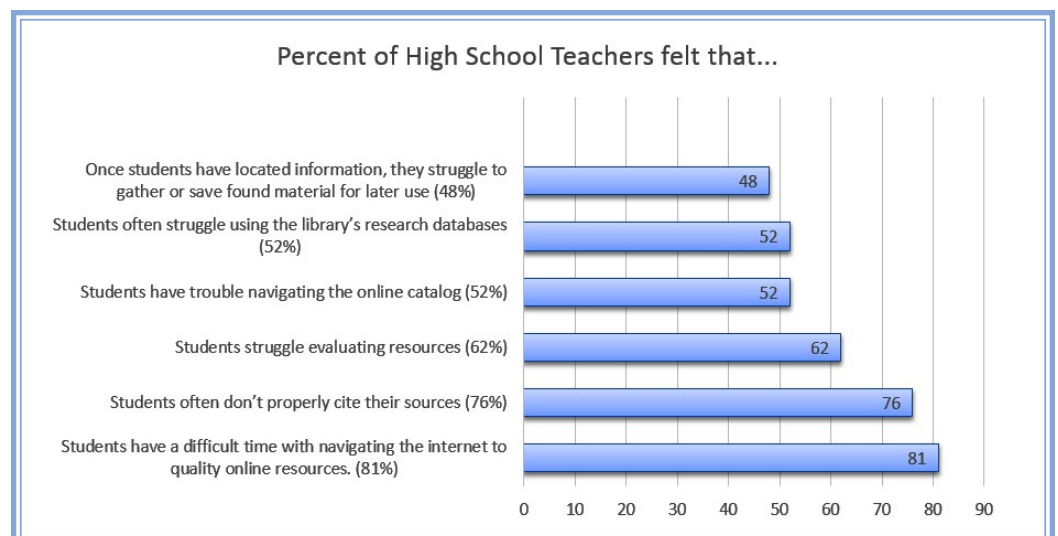
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1FB_Ix3lNVFYSYpLAlblj4pIQ_uzrKS1tsLNaPFUbzeQ/edit

Question

> Which areas do you find your students struggling with when conducting online and print research? Check all that apply. (21 Respondents)

Responses

> **17** (81% of respondents) Students have a difficult time with navigating the internet to quality online resources. They want to 'Google it' but tend to not filter their findings well—choosing whatever comes up in first ten or so hits, or simply giving up and going to Wikipedia.
>
> **16** (76%) Students often don't properly cite their sources. Perhaps even inadvertently plagiarize.
>
> **13** (62%) Students struggle evaluating resources, whether it is spotting bias or credibility issues to deciphering if it is relevant to their research needs.
>
> **11** (52%) Students have trouble navigating the online catalog to find useful print resources.
>
> **11** (52%) Students often struggle using the library's research databases.
>
> **10** (48%) Once students have located information, they struggle to gather or save found material for later use.

Percent of High School Teachers felt that...

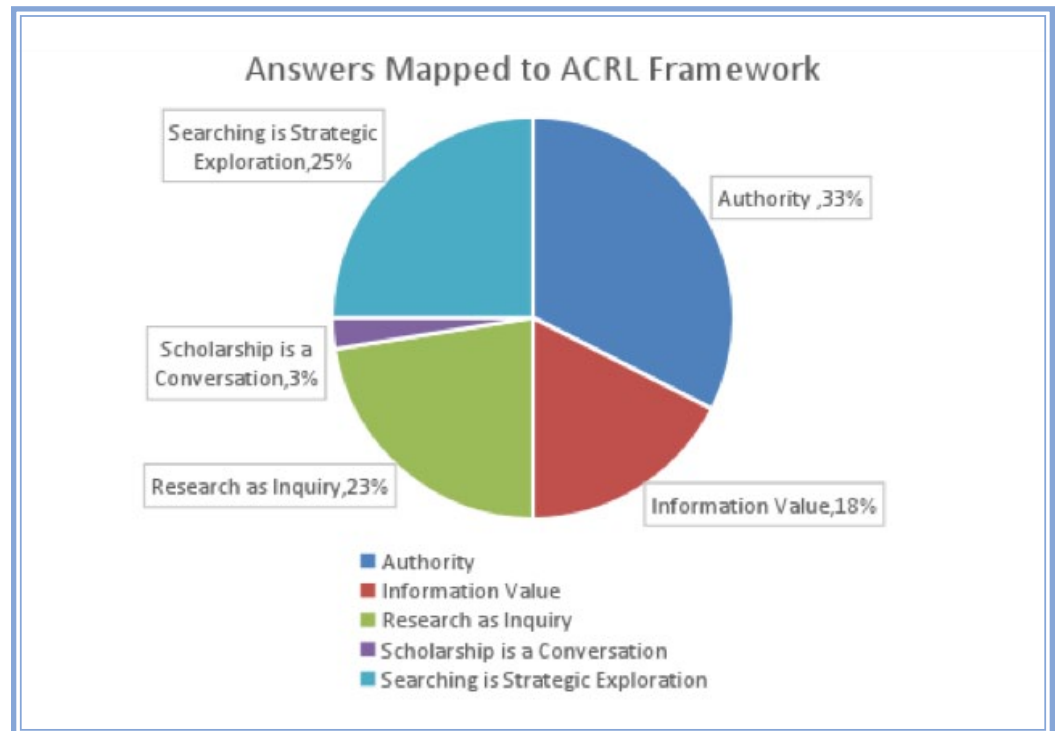| Statement	Percent
Once students have located information, they struggle to gather or save found material for later use (48%)	48
Students often struggle using the library's research databases (52%)	52
Students have trouble navigating the online catalog (52%)	52
Students struggle evaluating resources (62%)	62
Students often don't properly cite their sources (76%)	76
Students have a difficult time with navigating the internet to quality online resources. (81%)	81

Question

What type of learning opportunities would you like for yourself regarding research? (answer all that apply) (21 Respondents)

Responses

    14   (67%) Other information literacy skills and teaching strategies such as "how to evaluate" resources.

    10   (48%) Teaching citation and/or strategies to avoid plagiarism.

     9   (43%) Library databases introduction or refresher.

     7   (33%) Library catalog introduction or refresher for locating books and media.

     6   (29%) Fair use and copyright.

Question

What would you like to see your students do more of when it comes to research? (short answer) (20 Respondents)

Answers Mapped to ACRL Framework

- Authority, 33%
- Information Value, 18%
- Research as Inquiry, 23%
- Scholarship is a Conversation, 3%
- Searching is Strategic Exploration, 25%

Legend:
- Authority
- Information Value
- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship is a Conversation
- Searching is Strategic Exploration

Question

If only my students could/would/knew how to do 'x, y, or z' then they could have more success with their research. What is that 'x, y, or z'? (14 Respondents)

My students would be more successful if they knew more about...

■ Searching as Strategic Exploration   ■ Authority   ■ Information has Value   ■ Research as Inquiry