Doreen R. Bradley, Angie Oehrli, Soo Young Rieh, Gina Genova, Regen Le Roy, Julia Maxwell, and Emily Sartorius

'LARP'ING & INFO LIT

A "LIBRARIAN ACTION ROLE-PLAYING" ASSESSMENT FOR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' SOURCE EVALUATION SKILLS

The University of Michigan School of Information

The University of Michigan Library

BACKGROUND

Source evaluation is an increasingly important skill in our information landscape. Librarians frequently teach concepts of source evaluation to students during course-integrated information literacy sessions. As part of an IMLS grant, our research team conducted role-playing interviews to assess students' evaluation of sources.

METHOD

During the fall of 2019, undergraduate students in several college writing courses were administered a pre-session questionnaire to measure confidence in their abilities to determine if a source is credible and to know the difference between scholarly and non-scholarly articles. Students also completed a performative assessment in which they each evaluated one pre-selected randomized source. Following instruction, students completed the same questionnaire. In Winter 2020, 22 of these students participated in one-on-one role-playing interviews.

FINDINGS

CONCEPTIONS OF SOURCE:
Students intertwine the notions of "source" to mean a publisher, journal, or content; for students, the term "source" is undefined.

PUBLISHER RECOGNITION:
Students attribute credibility to publishers they believe are well respected, even when the sources are opinion-based and integrate little evidence.

DOMAIN NAMES:
Previously learned concepts around web address domains often lead students to make faulty assumptions before they begin to deeply evaluate a source.

AUTHOR EVALUATION:
Evaluating authors was challenging for students.

IMPLICATIONS

We've gained insights in improving information literacy teaching practices in introductory writing courses. The study identifies student abilities post-library instruction and also what gaps remain so that we can adjust lesson plans to address these gaps.

Regardless of institutional setting, understanding how students in first year writing courses evaluate sources and to what degree a one-shot instruction session can enhance their evaluation abilities is valuable to instruction librarians.

PROTOCOL

OPENING INTERVIEW

Students were asked a series of questions to greater explore their evolving understanding of source evaluation, what impact the library instruction session made in information literacy skills and how they may have applied these skills to other academic activities.

CARD SORTING

Participants sorted the following elements based on the importance in their evaluation process:
• Author • Publisher • Bias • Evidence • Relevance
• Domain Name (.org, .com, etc) • Information Format (blog, article, etc)

LIBRARIAN ROLE-PLAYING

A mock assignment was presented where participants were asked to evaluate two sources for a research project on stress and college students. Participants then took on the role of academic librarian and a researcher took on the role of student. The participant as "librarian" led the research team member through the evaluation of the two sources to demonstrate learning and retention from the information literacy instruction session. Role-play participants shared their evaluation strategies and priorities about source evaluation.

CARD SORTING REVISITED

Participants completed the same card sorting exercise.
Differences pre- and post-role play were assessed.

EXIT INTERVIEW

Participants were asked several reflection questions including:

• How well do you feel you evaluated these sources?
• How did it feel to articulate your evaluation process to someone else?
• Which part of the evaluation process was most challenging to explain?
• Is this how you typically would evaluate sources?
• Was anything done differently because you played the role of librarian?

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