Understanding IL Through the Eyes of the Teacher:

Information Literacy in Secondary Schools

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Purpose

- Noted discrepancy between student IL skill and organizational standards (ACRL)
  - Low student IL proficiency[1]
- Intrigued by how teachers might factor into this issue
  - Opportunity to teach IL
- Personal motivation
  - Based on my own experiences and struggles

1. Gross & Latham, 2007, 2009; Julien &Barker, 2009

The plan!

- Background
  - Literature
  - Alberta Education Curricula
- Method
  - Phenomenology
  - Qualitative Interviews with Critical Incident
- Results
  - Prominent Themes

Background

- Information Literacy (IL) and Information Literacy Instruction (ILI)
  - Benefits students and teachers[2]
    - High initial time/effort investment by teacher
    - Increased student self-confidence and self-efficacy
    - Higher quality student work; more engagement in course work
  - Coordinated efforts recommended
    - Librarian-teacher/faculty collaboration[3]
    - IL integrated within the curriculum[4]

2. Todd, 1995
3. Moore, 2005; Fister, 2009; McGuinness, 2006; Ragains, 2001; Saunders, 2009
4. Allen, 2007; Moore, 2005

Background

- Low undergraduate student IL proficiency [5]
  - Information Literacy Test
  - Indicates students are not entering post-secondary with the expected IL skills
- Low secondary student IL proficiency [6]
  - In-class activity with follow-up interviews
  - Indicates that students are not acquiring these skills in secondary education

5. Gross & Latham, 2007, 2009
6. Julien & Barker, 2009

Background

- Teacher beliefs and values influence instructional decisions [7]
  - Teachers teach what they see as essential for their students
- Alberta Education
  - Integrated IL within newer curricula (2004-present)
    - Social Studies
      - Research for Deliberative Inquiry
    - Language Arts
      - Outcome 3
    - Focus on Inquiry
      - Supports ILI throughout
    - Information and Communication Technology

7. Pajares, 1992

Background

- Williams & Wavell, 2007
  - Individual teachers are unique in their experience, comprehension and priorities in the classroom
  - Contextual factors such as current education practice, curriculum requirements, teacher experience (training, comprehension of topics, priorities in the classroom) shaped teacher descriptions of student information literacy
  - Concrete vs. Abstract ILI
  - Process seen as important
  - Time, or lack thereof, was a barrier

Method

- Methodology
  - Phenomenology
- In practice...
  - Interviews
    - Critical incident
    - ACRL standards as prompts
  - Data explication
    - Themes based on participant natural language
    - Epoche (bracketing) approach
      - Researcher as instrument

Method

- Recruitment
  - Posters
  - Listserv
  - Personal contacts and snowballing
- Participants
  - 8 teachers
    - 3 graduate students, 5 current teachers
      - 4 with high school experience (10-12)
      - 4 with junior high (7-9)
    - Themes were consistent throughout

Method

- Ethics
- Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed immediately following the interviews
- Extensive field notes supplemented the transcripts
- Data Explication
  - Nvivo
  - Pattern coded
  - Phenomenological approach

Dominant Themes

- Understanding of information literacy (IL)
- Understanding of student IL skill needs
- Understanding of student IL skill acquisition
- Understanding of student IL proficiency

Understanding of IL

- Inconsistent definition and scope
- Lack of familiarity with the term
  - *"Uh, I got an idea what it is but… I'm not sure."*
- Discomfort regarding lack of understanding
  - Shifting, clearing throat, perplexed looks
  - "I think"
  - "I guess"
  - "um…"

Defining IL

- "Um… Understanding information. How to get it. I think, that's probably…understanding where to get information and how to use it." (Dwight)

- "Um, being able to use information sources to get what you want to get for information. Research." (Bernie)

- "Makes me think of being, I guess, literate of, literate in the way of all the information that is out there." (Kate)

Scope of IL

- Scope ranged from broad to narrow
  - "being able to find information"
  - "some aspect of multiple literacies"
  - "holistic view"
- IL as interconnected with other literacies
  - "If you are looking for information, can you also read and incorporate visuals." (Rosie)
- Critical thinking
  - "Someone who is critically aware of all of the ways to find knowledge, to access information…and is able to interact, use, manipulate those to their advantage." (Fred)
- Emphasis on end-product, not process

Importance of IL

- "I think the more exposed they are to it at a younger age the more prepared they will be to use it in like high school and post-secondary." (Kate)

- "For some reason, we make this assumption that you know kids these days don't need our help with technology but that's like assuming that because I was born when the car was already invented that I don't need to learn how to drive, right. They absolutely still need to learn how to use these things." (Rosie)

Understanding of Student IL Skill Need

- Access information from various mediums and understanding information in context
  - "Able to pull information effectively out of a medium, whatever that medium is, that, I think, is critical so whatever information it is that they need to access, they have to be able to find it and make sense of it." (Tom)
- Paraphrasing
  - "[Students] need to be able to gather their own information and put things into their own words." (Kate)
- Creating personal connections to the information (relevance)
  - "Make it relevant to them, being able to take something that they read and not just regurgitate it but make it meaningful and being able to apply it to the real world, real life situation." (Kate)

IL need varies…

- Depended on 'track'
  - "Real-world versus how to do in-depth research questions." (Betty)
  - "Day to day life versus how to find answers to more abstract questions…" (Betty)
  - "Depending on whether or not they were on a university track…" (Rosie)
- Low proficiency rates of students who enter post-secondary education indicates that the students, even in academic streamed programs, are not acquiring sufficient IL skills.

Understanding of Student IL Skill Acquisition

- Learning IL via osmosis [8]
- Need and Drive
  - Self-efficacy
  - Required to complete assignments
    - "If they need that in order to survive…" (Fred)
    - "…perhaps their ability is going to be a little bit higher because they have been forced out of need." (Fred- on students pursuing post-secondary)

8. Moore, 2005

Understanding of Student IL Skill Proficiency

- Participant understanding of student IL skill was fairly consistent
  - Interesting given the study findings indicating that students are lacking these skills [9]

9. Gross & Latham, 2007, 2009; Julien & Barker, 2009; Moore, 2005

IL Strengths

- Identified strengths
  - "They have great informal skills." (Tom)
    - quick searches, using web-based reference sites
  - Able to locate information with ease
  - "[Students] are pretty competent with the computer and making searches and stuff." (Dwight)
  - "Sometimes they get stuff that's not really, not necessarily appropriate but for the most part, most of the kids are pretty good at it. They've had enough practice up to now that by grade 9 they can usually find what they need." (Bernie)

IL Weaknesses

- Identified weaknesses:
    - referencing, evaluating validity, identifying multiple sources, and supporting arguments with information
    - "I think because there is no formality to it. It just comes up on a webpage and you know, a lot of them don't even bother to see who wrote it. They accept it and use it."
    - "They're definitely plagiarists and they have no concept of copyright or anything like that … We talk to them about plagiarism all the time but they don't seem to feel that it belongs to anyone considering that it is in a public forum."

Implications

- The term, information literacy, is not known to most teachers
  - More comprehensive, or even less comprehensive, term
- Teachers value IL but did not instruct IL as an entire process
  - Metaphor for learning
- Assumptions regarding student ability also affected the IL taught
  - Varied skills not correlated to age or need; learning by osmosis does not necessarily work! [10]
- There is an expectation that IL will be taught
  - Explicit curricular mandates are required

10. Moore, 2005

Future research

- Follow-up with thesis
  - Look at application of Focus on Inquiry in core classes (case study)
  - In-depth look at planning for and supporting IL within core classes
- School libraries
  - Traditional understanding
  - Lack of data is data
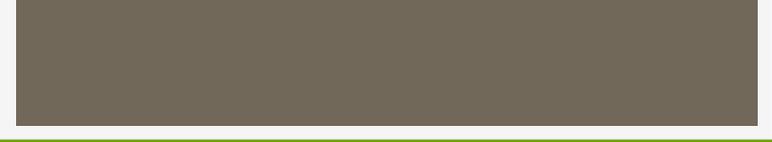
Thank you!

Please feel free to contact me at:

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Acknowledgements

- Thank you to the participants
- Thank you to my wonderful thesis committee:
  - Drs. Lisa Given, Heidi Julien, Susan Barker