

What are year 7 students' experiences of searching for information online and in text books?

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Abstract

The research we carried out aimed to find out what Year 7s experiences of searching online and in books are. To do this we gave 15 Year 7 students a 10minute research task using books and the internet. We observed them during the task and interviewed some of them afterwards. We found that Year 7s found it difficult to find information in both books and online but it was slightly easier for them to find information in books. The research suggested that Year 7s did not know how to research online effectively, for example by using key words and we conclude that Year 7s could be helped by being shown how to effectively search online

Introduction

We chose to research this topic because we found that teachers often ask students to do research on the internet, rather than in text books. We noticed that teachers expected students to know how to research online effectively and so think that they need little support.

We wanted to find out how students actually search for information - both in books and on the internet - to see whether they are able to research effectively. We decided to observe students carrying out a research task to see how they behaved during the tasks and how they found out the information for the tasks, and then interviewed them about their experiences of researching the tasks and to see how they found the information.

Our initial thought was that most people would prefer researching online than in book but that they would find out a lot more of information in books than online, as most of them wouldn't be able to search effectively online.

Method

We asked 13 year 7 students to participate in our study and gave them two tasks to do; one on the computer and another using text books.

We asked them to sign a permission form to say they were willing for us to observe them and to be interviewed. We told them all that they had the right to withdraw at any time. We also told them that their name would not be used in our research, everything is anonymous and that any recordings of interviews would be kept in accordance with the data protection act.

The task we gave the participants to do was to research the definitions or words and answers to specific questions. We split the participants into 2 groups where one half of the group did one part of the task using the internet and the other did the other part using text books. The task we gave them was to research specific topics using text books and the internet. We gave each group a different task to do which we then switched over after 15 minutes.

While they were doing the two tasks we observed them by using a tick sheet to help us gather the results easily. We were looking for how people behave online and in textbooks, the tick sheets had a list of behaviours for online and textbooks so that we could tick the boxes for what we saw, such as which search engines they used, which search engine result they went to, whether they used the index in a book, whether they copy and pasted information from the internet.

We planned to do 6 interviews after the tasks which we completed at a later stage. In the interviews we asked the participants questions which we recorded with their consent.

For example we asked:

- In the tasks did you find it easier researching on the internet or in text books? And Why?
- Do you feel confident searching on the internet? Do you feel you know enough about searching on the internet?

Results

The results we found from our observation sheets was that most of the Year 7's mainly used Google to search for the answers to the questions in the task as it is the school's homepage.

Interestingly they also mostly typed in the whole question into the search bar to find the correct results, rather than just typing a selection of keywords.

Almost all of the students used the first result the search engine returned to find out the information they needed, rather than browsing through later results.

Most of them copied and pasted from the websites. They claimed in interviews that they did that to try and save time as they didn't want to re-write the answer out. However a few of them adjusted the words which they did not understand.

Students reported that teachers frequently asked them to do research at home. Most of the participants preferred researching online to text books as they said that they were more familiar with the internet rather than books. They also said that it was quicker and easier to use the internet, and that they didn't have reference books when researching at home.

When the students used the books they also copied it word from word and not in their own words.

Discussion

Our research found that most kids don't actually know how to research online effectively for example how to use key words to search.

But when we asked them to research in text books they reported to us that they found it even harder than the internet task, because it was slow searching through the book and they didn't enjoy it as much as searching on the internet.

We also discovered that teachers assume that students know how to research using the internet, often asking them to do so for homework but in the interviews students told us that they are not aware of tips or hints for effective research, for example how to use key words.

Through all the research we have done we came to the conclusion that year 7s need to be taught how to research in the most effective way.