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UDLib/SEARCH: Enhancing Information Literacy in Delaware Public Schools Through Use of Technology

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Technology is being introduced to students at an earlier age each year. In today's society students need to acquire a comfort level with technology and strong information literacy skills, preferably at an early age. It is for this reason that schools are being encouraged to create programs that both pique students' interest in and develop their knowledge of technology.

UDLib/SEARCH is an example of a statewide program that enhances information literacy through use of technology and could be used as a model for similar programs. UDLib/SEARCH provides 16 periodical and encyclopedia databases as well as training on the use of these databases to educators in all public schools in the state of Delaware.

Mary Beth Jones, the librarian at Cedar Lane Elementary School, assists a student with using UDLib/SEARCH databases to learn about the state of Delaware.

Program History

UDLib/SEARCH has progressively expanded over the years. The program was developed in 1997 by Sandra Millard, who is the Program Director and University of Delaware Assistant Director for Library Public Services. UDLib/SEARCH began as a collaboration between the state of Delaware and the University of Delaware Library to provide online databases to public high schools throughout the state. In 1998 UDLib/SEARCH was expanded to include access for Delaware public middle schools. During the 2000/2001 school year, UDLib/SEARCH conducted a pilot program at Townsend Elementary School. The goal of the pilot program was to exhibit the benefits of providing online periodical and encyclopedia databases to elementary school students. It was evident, that the elementary school students gained from use of these resources. Townsend Elementary School's librarian Courtney Kaczka and the teachers at Townsend found a number of creative ways to use the databases to incite the curiosity of students and sharpen their research skills.

In the 2003/2004 school year, UDLib/SEARCH provided database access and training to the four middle schools and three elementary schools involved in the Information Power Collaboration Partnership, a Delaware program that improved the reading and writing skills of students through the integration of technology. During the 2004/2005 school year, the Delaware Department of State provided funding for a pilot program that expanded UDLib/SEARCH to approximately one-third of the state's public elementary schools that met criteria determined by the Delaware Department of Education. For the 2005/2006 school year, the Delaware Department of Education has increased the program's funding in order to provide access to age-appropriate databases for all public elementary schools in the state. Today, every computer with Internet access in any public middle or high school in Delaware can utilize three online encyclopedias—including one Spanish language encyclopedia—as well as thirteen periodical and reference databases that collectively contain images, reference material, primary documents, and thousands of full-text articles. Each public elementary school now has access to one online encyclopedia and three periodical and reference databases with content on the reading level of elementary school students. These resources have proven to be invaluable, particularly to school libraries with small print collections.

UDLib/SEARCH is funded by the State of Delaware via the Delaware Department of Education and is managed by the University of Delaware Library. This management includes negotiating contracts and license agreements pertaining to the program's databases as well as having University of Delaware librarians provide training and technical assistance with access to these resources to public school educators throughout the state.

UDLib/SEARCH Today

UDLib/SEARCH has been very successful. The program's databases provide educators with current, reliable, and easily accessible sources of information. With these databases, educators can teach students how to retrieve information by searching online databases, which enhances their research skills and helps them become more familiar with technology. The fact that the program provides access to a variety of resources such as articles, encyclopedias, and primary documents allows teachers and librarians to help students differentiate between various resources and evaluate which would be most beneficial for each of their research needs.

Other benefits of statewide programs that provide online databases to schools are their equity, their practicality, and their mobility. It is not very practical or affordable for a school to buy a set of encyclopedias as well as subscriptions to several periodicals for the library and every classroom in the school and then update them on an annual basis. However, through UDLib/SEARCH, the online equivalent of that is happening in Delaware public schools. Any computer with Internet access in participating schools, including computers in libraries, computer labs, and classrooms, can access the program's databases. The content of these databases is updated routinely throughout each year.

The Association of College and Research Libraries Division of the American Library Association states the following concerning information literacy: "To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. Producing such a citizenry will require that schools and colleges appreciate and integrate the concept of information literacy into their learning programs and that they play a leadership role in equipping individuals and institutions to take advantage of the opportunities inherent within the information society."

State-funded programs such as UDLib/SEARCH can play a pivotal role in increasing information literacy among students on a statewide level.

Training for Educators

Providing access to technology, however, is not enough to guarantee that it will actually become integrated into the learning environment. Training is another key component. In *Teachers of the 21st Century Know the What, Why, and How of Technology Integration*, Jolene Dockstader, a public school educator, states that "integration is not putting computers in the classroom without teacher training. It will not happen without training." The training sessions and technical support available in UDLib/SEARCH give teachers and librarians the opportunity to increase their own background

knowledge and comfort level with use of the program's databases before they begin instructing their students on how best to use them.

Training sessions are often scheduled as a way to review use of the program's databases with returning teachers and librarians who are familiar with these resources or as a method of introducing new educators to these resources. In many cases, training sessions are held during in-service days or staff meetings but are ultimately held at the convenience of the educators in the participating schools.

After the staff at Cedar Lane Elementary School received a UDLib/SEARCH training session, their Library Media Specialist Mary Beth Jones stated that, "Teachers were really excited to have access to so much up-to-date, relevant information that connected so perfectly to their curriculum."

Conclusions

UDLib/SEARCH is a program that can be used as a model for methods of increasing information literacy in public schools. This program has proven three things: (1) students can grasp the concept of and benefit from searching online databases—even at a young age, (2) statewide programs provide equity in access to resources, and (3) access to technology in schools coupled with training and technical support increases the probability that the resources will be used and that the technology will be successfully integrated into the classroom setting.

For more information about UDLib/SEARCH, please visit the program's web site at http://udlibsearch.lib.udel.edu/.

Works Cited

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