

Navigating to Information Literacy: A Collaboration Between California High School and College Librarians

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Background

The stereotype of the librarian as a solitary, bookish figure is, of course, a myth. In reality, librarians readily collaborate with one another. Bakersfield College librarian Nancy Guidry knew this first-hand from having worked twenty years as a young adult librarian at a public library where she frequently collaborated with local middle school and high school librarians. So when Guidry was hired as a reference librarian at Bakersfield College (BC) in 2000, reaching out to librarians at the Kern High School District (KHSD) in Bakersfield seemed natural, particularly after she discovered the difficulties many college freshmen at BC had with a variety of research skills.

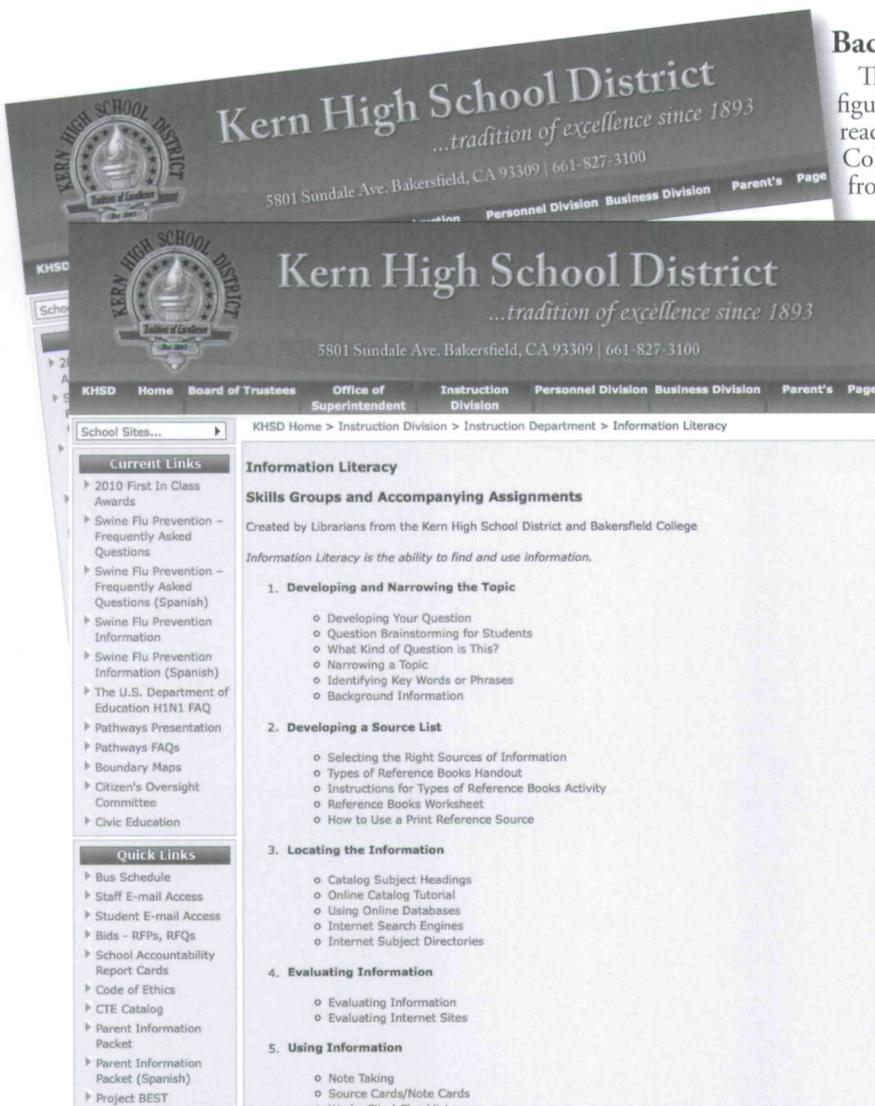
Guidry made contact with several KHSD Teacher Librarians in the spring of 2002, visiting their libraries and gaining an understanding of their operations. She noted that although the libraries were well equipped with books and databases, a number of factors limited student use. These ranged from Teacher Librarians being over-burdened with monitoring textbooks and having minimal support staff, to overworked teachers who really didn't have the time to spend on full-blown research projects, to students who were not interested in taking college prep courses because they planned to enter the labor market upon graduation.

Guidry's initial outreach resulted in a joint meeting of all the KHSD Teacher Librarians, BC librarians, and representatives from the Cal State Bakersfield library in the fall of 2002. The goal was to start a dialogue on ways to improve student information literacy skills at all levels. During this first meeting, several BC professors gave examples of the types of research they expected students to be able to conduct in entry-level classes. The Teacher Librarians were struck by the sizable gap between the high expectations of college professors and the limited research abilities of the average high school graduate. At the end of the meeting, attendees decided to form a small working group to address this problem.

One of the group's first undertakings was to develop a list of core information literacy skills based on the Big 6 (Eisenburg & Berkowitz 1990). They examined findings in the California Academic Senate's statement on competencies expected of students (Academic Senate, 2002) as well as the Association of College and Research Libraries' document, "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education" (2000). After identifying key skills, the group developed a short in-library assignment for each one.

Over the course of a year, the working group created 30 generic library activities that could be used across the curriculum with resources in any KHSD library. At the beginning of the 2003 academic year, the group met with all the KHSD Teacher Librarians to review the assignments and brainstorm methods for using them. Each Teacher Librarian received a binder and a CD with camera-ready copies of the assignments. In addition, the information literacy skill groups, along with links to all the assignments, were posted on the KHSD website, <http://www.kernhigh.org/Instruction/Instruction/InformationLiteracy.aspx>. These lessons, revised as necessary, provide the foundation for teaching the research process.

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Additionally, cooperative projects between the librarians at BC and KHSD have resulted in frequent meetings to share ideas and current research strategies. The bond between BC and the KHSD was strengthened further when Dawn Dobie, a Teacher Librarian from the District, was hired by the college library. In 2008, the two groups established a joint set of Internet evaluation guidelines, (*Evaluating Web Information*, 2008), which are initially taught at the high school and reinforced at the community college.

The College Library Survival Skills Project

As spring 2010 approached, the librarians in both systems brainstormed next steps. A common thread of discussion among the high school Teacher Librarians was the alarming downturn in research project assignments. The pressure on teachers to have students perform well on standardized tests had swung the classroom focus away from research.

The college librarians observed that very few students coming from area high schools had adequate training in finding, evaluating, and using information for research purposes. A few Teacher Librarians asked if the BC librarians could create a larger awareness of what information literacy skills students were expected to be proficient in once they reached college. Some suggested that, if nothing else, the project could focus on senior students and their teachers. The Teacher Librarians recommended sharing examples of college assignments to bring home the reality of what lay ahead for all those heading to post-secondary education. The College Library Survival Skills Project was launched.

BC reference librarians Nancy Guidry and Dawn Dobie found evidence that what was happening in the KHSD was not an anomaly. The *ACT National Curriculum Survey* (2009) examined the differences between secondary-school and higher-education teachers regarding learner preparation. When asked if "their students are prepared for college-level work in their content area," 91 percent of high school educators responded yes; only 26 percent of college instructors agreed with this statement. In the same survey, 71 percent of high school teachers said "their state standards prepare students well or very well for college"; only 28 percent of college educators agreed with this statement (ACT, p. 5).

A national movement to resolve this gap between high school and college expectations became part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 in which the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association's Center for Best Practices joined to coordinate the Common Core Standards Initiative. According to the Initiative's Mission Statement on their website, the standards developed in this project were "designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers" (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2010). The Standards also emphasized information literacy skills. Among the four "Anchor Standards" for writing in the English Language Arts for grades 6-12 is "Research to Build and Present Knowledge." Given this national movement, the college librarians felt they could help KHSD sites to be ahead of the wave in preparing teachers and students, especially if the Core Standards were adopted in California.

In April 2010 Dobie and Guidry presented "Library Survival Skills to Succeed in College" to all of the KHSD Teacher Librarians and Debra Thorson, director of instructional materials for KHSD. Their presentation aimed to meet the Teacher Librarians' requests in that it listed 14 areas of expectation that college professors have of their students, offered sample assignments from a variety of BC classes, and showed examples of online activities students could engage in to gain skills in each area.

The BC librarians wanted to provide a toolkit that Teacher Librarians could use to convince their teachers of the importance of research-related curriculum throughout students' high school years. A PowerPoint presentation was designed for Teacher Librarians to use with their own teaching staffs. In addition, Dobie and Guidry offered to have BC librarians visit school sites and make presentations to teachers, students, and/or administrators. Subsequently, Teacher Librarians developed an Internet Resource web page linked to the project (Guidry, 2010), with a reference to at least one website for each of the 14 skill areas.

Teacher Librarians Take the Lead

From the beginning of the collaboration between the college and the high school libraries, the KHSD Teacher Librarians have used a variety of methods to gain faculty buy-in regarding the importance of information literacy. Starting in 2003, Candice Irby at Highland High School worked with her school's English department to create an "Information Literacy Ladder" based upon the Research & Technology Standards within California's Language Arts Content Standards for grades 9-12 (California Department of Education, 1997). Other Teacher Librarians replicated Irby's work at their sites, some using the term "Information Literacy Scaffold."

Jan Hartsell of Golden Valley High School (GVHS) distributed binders of the "Information Literacy Lessons" to each member of the English department at her site. Dawn Dobie, then a Teacher Librarian at East Bakersfield High School, secured funding for faculty workshops for teachers in various curricular areas. All workshop participants learned about the steps of research and developed information literacy lessons for their particular area of the curriculum. Other Teacher Librarians found great success tailoring various research projects to the information literacy lessons.

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Within the College Library Survival Skills Project, individual Teacher Librarians have again used their creativity and connections to school faculty to make a difference. Jan Hartsell of GVHS shared "Library Skills to Succeed in College," a PowerPoint presentation, during a meeting of the English department. Then she led a discussion about the types of research projects that were assigned by various professors at Bakersfield College. In addition, she sent a copy of the presentation to GVHS administrators and other departments with a pro-active message about college and career readiness as outlined in the Common Core Standards. This advocacy paid off when Hartsell later successfully lobbied her principal to pay for online database subscriptions for the school site.

At Highland High School, Teacher Librarian Candice Irby arranged for Nancy Guidry to share the Library Survival Skills presentation with the English department and AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) teachers in late spring 2010. After the presentation, the two departments decided that each grade level team of English as well as AVID teachers would meet with the Irby in June to vertically align research assignments with the Research and Technology strands of the California Language Arts Content Standards for grades 9-12 (California Department of Education, 1997).

In addition, the teachers incorporated the KHSD/BC Information Literacy Lessons into the assignments. Senior teachers would focus on a comprehensive review of what students had previously learned, giving the students a final opportunity to acquire any needed library skills before leaving high school. Seniors would begin with a pre-test of selected skills followed by a research assignment, allowing them to put their skills into practice. With a continuum of aligned assignments, future Highland students will be able to regularly learn new research skills as they review more familiar ones.

North High School (NHS) Teacher Librarian Pamela DesLauriers discussed the possibility of inviting Guidry and Dobie to campus with the English department Chair at her school site. When she received an enthusiastic response, DesLauriers then approached the school's administrative team. To her delight, the administrators suggested expanding the invitation beyond the English Department to teachers in all areas; in addition, they made funds available to pay for release time for teachers who wanted to attend. On the day of the presentation, teachers from English, Social Studies, Science, Modern Language and AVID attended. DesLauriers reports that the conversation she and NHS teachers engaged in after the BC presentation has had some lasting effects on how NHS teachers design their writing assignments.

Looking to the Future

As this article goes to press, several exciting developments have occurred that bode well for the success of the collaborative efforts between the KHSD Teacher Librarians and the BC librarians. In August, 2010, the California State Board of Education voted unanimously to adopt the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics; they are scheduled to go into effect for the 2013-2014 academic year.

Upon announcing the adoption of the Core Standards, California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell stated that he would direct staff "to develop a timeline and plan for implementing the standards which will address curriculum frameworks, instructional materials, assessments, and accountability measures" (McLean, 2010). The clearly-outlined writing standards that require research should boost teachers' interest in weaving research activities back into the curriculum.

Another focus of future activity for KHSD and BC library faculty is developing or revising assessment instruments and techniques to measure understanding and growth in the areas of information literacy. Candice Irby's use of pre-tests and post-tests at Highland High may serve as a model for this effort.

At the beginning of the 2010-11 school year, the KHSD Office of Instruction requested that Dobie and Guidry make their presentation to all of the Assistant Principals of Instruction at a fall, 2010, meeting. The librarians hope this exposure to college expectations will build support for the KHSD library programs. It is vital that administrators see school library programs as legitimate and relevant in a time of shrinking resources. This program can help administrators to value the expertise of Teacher Librarians to lead students through the various parts of the research process. Furthermore, administrators will be encouraged to support the purchase of up-to-date print materials as well as electronic database subscriptions.

Conclusion

At times, Teacher Librarians at school sites feel as though they are alone in their battle to engage students in library research. Cooperating with other professionals lessens this isolation while boosting the role of the library in the school. The relationship between the KHSD and BC that began eight years ago promises future benefits to both parties. High school Teacher Librarians will be able to collaborate with teachers to offer students meaningful research opportunities. This will lead to students at the local community college and beyond who arrive better prepared for academic success.

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JAN HARTSELL currently is a Teacher Librarian at Golden Valley High School in Bakersfield, California. She started her career in Speech Education, taught English in Kern High School District for several years, and has been a Teacher Librarian for 12 years. She is a CSLA Southern Section Region 1 representative and has been a presenter at CSLA Conferences.

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