Assessing the Authentic Learning Assessment Project

Report for the Spring 2009 Authentic Assessment Project
Post to http://informationliteracywactc.pbwiki.com
Due June 19, 2009

The purpose of this report is to reflect on your learning and to create a repository of shared ideas and strategies for Washington state community and technical college libraries.

Project Summary (about 200 words)

For this Information Literacy project, we guided low-intermediate international ESL students through the steps of searching for, evaluating, and selecting level-appropriate ESL grammar web sites. Students first learned to search the Internet using keywords. Each group then needed to find one appropriate grammar website. These websites needed to adhere to specific criteria. At the end of the project, student pairs presented their selected website to a group of peers and instructors, and justified its selection based on evaluation criteria they learned during this project. Finally, the class's list of selected grammar resources was assembled and compiled into a list for use as independent study aids.

While the students in this Level 3 Listening Speaking Grammar were not new to online searching, the pre-project survey indicated that they all lacked critical thinking skills in approaching web content. Course content was delivered through a step-by-step process where keyword searching and evaluating skills were explicitly taught. We focused heavily on the need for evaluation and spent additional time reinforcing the concepts of authority, purpose, and intended audience. These information-literacy skills were taught within the larger ESL course outcomes of speaking, listening, and grammar.

Participants – Who worked on this project?

Librarians: Elinor Appel
Faculty: Marcie Leek
Class name(s) and approximate number of students involved: Intensive English Level 3: Listening, Speaking, Grammar; 10 students

Learning Outcomes or Project Outcomes – What did you want the students to be able to do? OR What did you intend to accomplish?

The students needed to be able to identify and use keywords effectively in searching the Internet for level-appropriate grammar websites. The students also needed to be able to understand terms such as *Mission, About* and to identify domains in a url so they could draw conclusions about the website. Students also needed to be able to understand conceptually why a commercial website might be less informative than an educational or government one, and they needed to apply these criteria in selecting a website for their final project.

Our broader goal was to help students begin to learn to think critically, a skill they would need in their future as college students in the United States.

Curriculum – What did the students need to know? What content needed to be covered?
For learning keyword searching students needed to know vocabulary (*grammar*, *practice*, etc.) and to understand concepts such as combining terms for best results. For learning website analysis students needed to know vocabulary (*About, Mission, Contact*) and to find and understand the different types of domain embedded in a url. Additionally, students needed to make connections between the type of domain and the possible services and content on a website. Students also needed to understand what evaluation is and why it can be important. This was the most challenging concept to teach. They did not approach web resources critically, nor did they understand that after finding a "good" grammar website they needed to defend their choice based on the criteria they were learning.
Pedagogy – What were the settings and learning activities for the students to gain/develop these abilities?
Students learned about web searching, keywords, and evaluating websites in the student technology lab. Lab activities included lecture/discussion and an enormous amount of guided searching through worksheets that reinforced each concept and included hands-on practice. Students supplemented their online work in the library classroom, where they continued to search for websites and began to practice their final presentations. Students also came to the library for one-on-one help with the librarian in finding and evaluating websites, and to continue practicing their presentations. Students presented to their peers in their classroom, where only the presenters had access to the computers.
Assessment – How did the students demonstrate the learning? What assessment did you design for students? (Attach any assessment tools you used)
Assessment tools: pre and post-survey (including questions about online search behavior and a reflective component at the end), in-class exercises (numerous worksheets and homework exercises), presentation script and rubric, and final presentation. In addition, the instructor gave the students extensive feedback on every assignment.
Criteria – How did you (instructor and librarian) know the students had done this well? How did you judge/evaluate the performance?
We based our final assessment on their presentation scripts, final presentations and a post-assessment survey. For the scripts and presentations we created rubrics. Student work was assessed. When it became apparent that the students were not making the necessary connections in applying evaluative criteria to websites, the instructor created an additional worksheet and practice assignment. The work the students did on this additional assignment showed us they were ready to move on to finding a website and preparing their presentations.

Data – What data did you collect? How did the students perform? Please include the data (even if you have to mail it to us) if at all possible.

Student practices and opinions toward web searching and evaluating (surveys). Web search skills using keywords (worksheets). Web evaluation skills (rubric/worksheet).

Our post-survey indicated that our students improved in both searching for and evaluating the websites they retrieved. For instance, in our pre-survey 40% of our students selected "never" to the question: "When you choose a website, do you think about WHO made it?" and 60% said they "sometimes" look at who created a website. At the end of the quarter 66.7% of the students selected "yes" to that same question and none selected "no." In the survey we also asked the students to demonstrate their learning by comparing and analyzing three different ESL websites using the skills they learned in class. Five out of nine students selected the most reliable (.gov) site and the other four chose a website from the .org domain. We also included a reflection component on the survey, asking students how their work has changed the way they look at websites. Many students were able to describe how their behavior had changed. For example: "Before I began this quarter, I just search at random. However, now I search domain of website at the first time. I search that this website have information that I need."

Best Practices – What Best Practice would you pass on to other librarians or discipline faculty?

Break down the search and evaluation processes into small, discrete steps. Be clear in all aspects of instruction. Include and reinforce new vocabulary. Assess student progress repeatedly. Reinforce concepts as needed. Finally, reassure the students along the way. This is hard work and positive feedback should be offered as often as possible. The students were understandably nervous about presenting to their peers in other classes, but having them do so gave their project more weight. They were all clearly proud of their success and enjoyed the well-deserved applause they received.

Key learning – What's your observation or reflection on this project? What did you or the faculty member learn from this project?

The instructor learned about web evaluation. The librarian learned about the challenges instructors face teaching critical-thinking skills to this particular population. We both were surprised at the minimal amount of critical thinking exhibited by our students at the beginning of this project. We needed to break down and make explicit the reasons for and process of approaching web content in a critical manner. We also needed to repeat the steps in the evaluation process more times than we had expected. Indeed, several pairs struggled to find an appropriate website for their presentation. (Interestingly, none accepted one from us, even to save time. Each group insisted on continuing to search and evaluate themselves, even though this put some groups temporarily behind the course schedule.) We also noticed that during the presentation the few times a group failed to mention a key component in their website analysis, they were prompted to do so by a peer from the class. We never had to add a word ourselves. In the end, we were amazed and gratified (and inspired) to see how students loved rising to the challenge of this project and how many took ownership of their learning.