

The library media specialist looked over the shoulder of the fifth grader, pleased to see that the student had the encyclopedia open to the article where she would find the answer to one of her questions about the formation of sedimentary rocks. “It isn’t here. I can’t find it,” the student spoke in frustrated tones. The student had obviously applied the skills from previous instruction about finding the appropriate encyclopedia volume (“r” for rock instead of “s” for sedimentary). She had even turned to the page where sedimentary rocks could be found. The library media specialist thought that once the student found the correct page, she would be able to easily spot the information and take notes. “Why can’t she find the needed information? It is right in front of her!” she thought.

Terminology Differences

One problem the library media specialist neglected to consider was the difference in terminology between the student and the actual reference source. The questions written by the student during the Task Definition phase of the information problem-solving process typically incorporate vocabulary from the student’s narrow repertoire. Even if the teacher dictated the information she wanted students to find, this vocabulary may differ from the vocabulary in the actual source. In the example above, the student had a list of information needed, but that list didn’t exactly match the terms in the reference source. Also, acquiring information from sources requires students to read for details and skim and scan for information.

Many young children have not yet mastered these skills. I know all this first-hand, as I was this library media specialist!



By Barbara A. Jansen

Have students practice identifying keywords and related words (see Location and Access in the April/May 2005 issue of LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION) to give students more points of access when reading to answer questions. To a student’s question, “When was Coretta Scott King born?” a reference source may just give the dates when she was born instead of stating, “Coretta Scott King was born on February 21, 1921.” An encyclopedia will cover a state’s economic resources, not necessarily as an easily recognizable list (e.g., “Economic resources are cattle, cotton and oil, and farming.”), but in narrative form (e.g., “Cattle and cotton dominated the economy of Texas before oil was discovered. Texas remains one of the nation’s most productive farming states. It often leads all other states in the production of cotton and the raising of beef cattle. Corn, sorghum, wheat, rice, and oats are also important crops. In addition to cattle, the state’s livestock includes sheep, chickens, turkeys, pigs, and horses.”). The classroom teacher or library media specialist must help students make the connection by helping students identify related words. For example, “What do we mean by ‘economic resources’? Look for key words such as domesticated animals, technology, logging, farming, agriculture, water, minerals, oil, and manufacturing.” The students should write the list in a contrasting color below the corresponding question on their note-taking organizer so those terms are available when they are needed.

Note Taking

Once a beginning researcher recognizes the section that contains needed information, he or she usually copies the entire paragraph when just a phrase or two would be sufficient. Library media specialists and classroom teachers often tell students, “Don’t copy word for word,” and “Put it in your own words.” But, this is easier said than done! Children at this age

may not completely comprehend specific words and phrases, and their vocabularies limit their ability to paraphrase. Also, children are typically asked to find facts or dates. These kinds of information often can’t or don’t need to be paraphrased—just correctly located!

According to Stripling and Pitts (1988), there are four types of notes a student can take: citation (e.g., facts, statistics, dates), summary, paraphrase, and quotation. Elementary students will use citation and possibly summary when taking notes from sources. State standardized tests often require that students recognize a summary and paraphrase. This skill, however, is developmentally difficult for students who are younger than age 11 to do on their own.

One highly successful approach to help students learn types of note taking is my “Trash-N-Treasure” method (Jansen, 2001), which instructs beginning researchers on citation level note taking. It also helps students identify the needed sections of a reference source and target the important words to extract for their stated purpose. They can then use these words to summarize and paraphrase. Another technique for teaching summary note taking is to give students an easy-to-read paragraph and have them identify the main idea and verbalize the supporting details. They can then practice writing the main idea with the supporting details in their own words.

Technology for Recording Notes

There are a number of software tools available to help young students learn to take better notes:

- > Microsoft® Word
- > PowerPoint
- > Inspiration® or Kidspiration® software (if available)
- > Big6™ TurboTools (if available; see related article in this issue)

Of course, you will introduce these over time—not all at once!

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Now that many schools have Microsoft Office, PowerPoint is a readily available, highly useful note-taking tool. When using PowerPoint, encourage students to record as few words as possible for each bullet point, and create a new slide when they change ideas or topics. However, students should not use their PowerPoint note-taking slides as their completed presentation (Big6 #5, Synthesis); allowing students to use their note-taking slides as their presentations can encourage copying and does not promote higher-level thinking in the final product.

Graphic organizers are also useful for note taking. Two examples of this type, a data chart and a note form, are offered in the bibliography (see Jansen, 2004 [Data Chart]; Jansen, 2004 [Note Form]).

Giving credit to sources consulted is important, but knowing when to do so and for what is not always easy. For example, much of the material young students record is common knowledge and doesn't require citing. But even up to sixth grade, students may not have the frame of reference or the experience to determine what is common knowledge and what isn't. Therefore, we recommend instilling good citation habits by having students cite every source they use. One interesting approach is used by a library media specialist in Lumberton, Texas. She has her young students write a "thank-you list" instead of calling it a bibliography; this title helps them understand the importance of giving credit to sources.

Younger children can include the author and title, increasing the amount of bibliographic information as the cognitive abilities of the students increase. Introducing students to TurboCite in the Big6 TurboTools product or some of the Web-based citation tools (e.g., Citation Machine <www.landmark-project.com/citation_machine/index.php>) is a good way to show the parts of a citation needed for various resources and help children with the tedious process of formatting. Note that citing electronic resources is not easy; the bibliographic information may not

be as straightforward as that of print sources. Even high school students and adults need help with these!

Have fun with students in the process of learning how to better use information from sources. Mastery will take time and effort, so library media specialists and classroom teachers should find ways to work together to build students' knowledge and skills over time. The payoff in terms of overall student performance is huge! ■

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