

SCIL Works 2008 Presentation

Research as a Cognitive Process

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Finding that students believe that research begins and ends with the mere location of material, how can we encourage a more critical framework that gives students a context for evaluating their decision making during the research process?

Many of us have read Carol Kuhlthau's seminal work, *Seeking Meaning*, and have been influenced in our reference and instruction practices by her findings on the research process and the experiences of students. Her model of the research process makes explicit some of the tacit knowledge that undergraduates are expected to develop. Tacit knowledge of how to meet unspoken requirements is essential to students' success but is not often taught through direct instruction. Many professors still assume that students will pick up the skills of research by following assignment guidelines, but they don't systematically introduce students to what research should look and feel like. Librarians are invited to teach students about the tools of research and, following the one-hour session, professors believe they have fully prepared their students. But what if librarians could make some of the tacit knowledge about research explicit for students? Introducing Kuhlthau's model to students and having them reflect on their own experience, consider the implications of approaching research as a systematic cognitive process rather than an amorphous technology-based activity, and recognize the control they can exert over the outcome of the process can give students an alternative to their current practice. It can also enlighten our demonstrations of search tools by connecting them to the critical thinking and decision making that we know are the hallmarks of a sound research process.

The presenters will outline their use of the Research Process Model in varied contexts, including one-shot, workshop, in-person credit, and online credit instruction. Materials will be shared and methods described. The results of students' reflections on research following the introduction of the Model will reveal the novelty and usefulness of this approach.