

A student-centred approach to developing resource lists and its impact on learning

Judith Keene, University Librarian

Jennifer Dumbleton, Academic Liaison Librarian, Institute of Education

Sarah Brewster, PITE

Ellie Newman, PITE

Abstract

The project investigated student perceptions and use of current resource lists and gave Primary ITE students the opportunity to develop their own list. Evidence suggests that current lists are mainly used as a starting point for assignments, and students would welcome the chance to influence their content. It was felt the concept is worth developing further.

Introduction

Resource (reading) lists are integral to most courses within Higher Education, and yet there has been little investigation into their impact upon student learning. They are created by academic staff, often with the aim of encouraging wider engagement with the subject; but evidence suggests that student use of them is largely driven by finding resources to support summative assessments (Stokes and Martin, 2008; Brewerton, 2014). The introduction of an online resource list system (Talis Aspire) provided an opportunity to influence practice and culture within the University.

The observed variation in the format and structure of UoW lists led initially to discussions about developing guidelines on what made a list 'student friendly'; then to whether students could help develop the lists themselves. A secondary question was whether such a list would have greater impact upon student learning.

Methodology

2 second year students on the Primary ITE course were recruited to the project and interviewed their fellow students on their current use of lists within their learning. The

information gained was used to develop a brief online survey which was advertised to all students on the course by means of email, once ethical approval had been obtained. The students then uploaded their own version of a reading list to Aspire.

Outcomes

Survey Findings

There were 48 responses to the survey, the majority from 2nd year students. Their responses reflected those reported in the published literature, with a strong emphasis on assignments.

The SAP students themselves, like 77% of their peers, had bought the recommended reading before starting the course, but had only found some of it to be useful. 22% of the respondents said they didn't use resource lists at all, with 12% finding them of limited relevance or use at times. Of those who do use lists, 80% mainly use them to find books for assignments, but also seek out additional sources. Only 19% used them for wider reading, contrary to many academics aspirations (Brewerton, 2014). This may be influenced by the heavy workload, including directed reading, of PITE students.

Respondents gave strong support (67%) for student input into lists 77% said they already share useful resources with their peers, either verbally or through social media. Students were positive about the online list system but noted the need for all modules to engage with it.

The Student generated list

An existing module list was adapted, with the students retaining many items, removing some and adding additional resources (mainly books and websites) that they had found useful for the assignment.

The Academic Liaison Librarian reviewed the student list and found it to be appropriate and with good quality sources included,; interestingly, the students had included fewer journal articles, feeling it veered towards “spoon-feeding”.

Impact of the project

The project obtained useful information on student use and perceptions of lists, which although based on a small number of respondents, agreed well with other published results. The students produced a good quality list to test with next year’s cohort.

The original plan had intended for more students to meet and collaboratively develop a list, and also to evaluate how the process of having input in developing their reading lists supported their learning. This was not possible because of the small number of students recruited. Working with PITE students was also challenging because of the extensive time spent out on placement.

Student input to resource lists is highly innovative, with only one article traced which refers to it (Davis, 2012). A presentation on this project given at a librarianship conference generated considerable interest from attendees and Talis, the company who produce the resource list software (Dumbelton and Keene, 2015).

Conclusions

Resource lists in their present form are not universally used by students, and are largely used as a starting point for assignments. Students like the idea of inputting to reading lists, although there are challenges to engaging both students and academic staff in such a process. Given the current use of social media to share resources, a feature within Aspire to recommend resources may be one way forward. External interest in the concept suggests it worth taking forwards.

Recommendations and plans for further work

1. Further explore student perceptions and use of lists and discuss findings with academic staff
2. Share the student generated list with next year's cohort to compare it with the tutor's list.
3. Encourage consistent use of Aspire in all modules and provide help to students in using it
4. Investigate with Talis ways to integrate student input or recommendations into Aspire lists

Bibliography

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