



Experiences of High School Students Conducting Term Paper Research Using Filtered Internet Access

AASL
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Purpose

To study the experiences of high school students conducting term paper research with filtered Internet access in a suburban high school media center.



Statement of Problem

- Students are heavy Internet users
- Media Center is site for Internet access in schools
- Computers in Media Center are filtered
- Filtered access raises intellectual freedom concerns



Qualitative Methods

■ Site

- Suburban high school
- N2H2 filter on computers

■ Participants

- Purposeful selection
- 2 classes, 28 students
- 2 teachers, 2 librarians
- 1 technology administrator



Data collection

- Participant observation
- Semi-structured interviews
- Focus group interviews
- E-mail journal entries from students





Class Profiles

■ Rhetoric Class

- Experienced teacher
- Top students
- Preparation by librarian
- Argumentative research paper
- Databases as well as Internet



Class Profiles

- Basic Composition Class
 - Independent teacher
 - Average students
 - No preparation by librarian
 - Casebook assignment
 - Reliance on Internet



Central Issues

■ Overblocking

- www.ncaa.org, www.ama.org,
www.mpaa.org
- Lack of effective unblocking procedure
- “Why should you have to go out of your way to get to something that’s harmless?”

Central Issues

■ Underblocking

- www.crackwalker2tripod.com
- Less frequent than overblocking
- “Just what I need, 10 reasons to be a transsexual!”





Central Issues

- Getting around the filter
 - Use different search engine
 - “Refresh” button
 - Page translators
 - Change in terminology
 - Use home computer
 - “You can get into any site if you go about it the right way.”

Central Issues

- How students feel about blocking
 - Frustrated
 - Annoyed
 - Angry
 - Not trusted
 - “It’s not fair, we can handle this stuff.”





Central Issues

- Overall assessment of filter
 - Rhetoric: 12 of 13 students said it hinders research
 - “How could anything that restricts information be helpful?”
 - Basic Comp: 3 positive, 1 negative, 8 qualified responses
 - “It’s annoying, but necessary because of the bad stuff.”



Central Issues

■ Alternate Solutions

- Pop-up blockers
- Vary filter by age level
- Trial period
- “Every teacher could get a certain password to turn the filter off to use in a class.”

Research questions

■ Nature of Internet use

- Rhetoric: trained by librarian, cautious on “biased” sites, used databases
- Basic Comp: no training, naïve searching, no databases



Research Questions

- Who are the actors?
 - Rhetoric: cream of the crop
 - “Our time is precious”
 - Basic Comp: community college bound
 - Confident in ability to handle the real world



Research Questions

- What is the setting?
 - Middle class, suburban
 - 94% white
 - All students had computer at home



Research Questions

- What are the activities?

| | Rhetoric | Basic Comp |
|--------------------|----------|------------|
| Database Usage | 72 % | 0 % |
| Internet Searching | 10 % | 98 % |
| E-mail | 18 % | 2 % |

Research Questions

- Presence of digital divide?
 - Every student had home computer allowing less restrictive access
 - Students saw *potential* for digital divide
 - “Kids wouldn’t get the whole story, only what the filter lets through.”



Research Questions

- Barriers to legitimate information with filters?
 - Overblocking
 - “Sites that were blocked actually were reputable sites that would have been useful for my research.”



Research Questions

- How do students overcome barriers?
 - Alternate search engine
 - Change terminology
 - Page translators
 - Use home computer



Research Questions

- Outside influences?
 - Administrator: parents complained
 - Teacher: political correctness, pressure from parents
 - Student: it makes the school look bad



Research Questions

- Infringement on 1st Amendment Rights?
 - Students have rights
 - Protected speech filtered out
 - School filters unlikely to be ruled unconstitutional, post-CIPA.



Research Questions

- Harm to students?
 - Students: no big deal
 - We can handle it, but other “immature” students cannot.



Implications for Policy

- Upper level high school students can be capable of using the Internet wisely
- No evidence of harm from inappropriate sites



Implications for Policy

- Education programs may be more effective than filtering in teaching critical thinking skills
- “It is difficult to teach young people self-control and judgment by denying them access to those things about which they need to exercise judgment.”





Implications for Policy

- Guidelines for Decision Making
 - Implement educational programs
 - Ask if filtering is necessary
 - Require instruction by librarians
 - Seek broad input before filtering
 - Filter at lowest settings
 - Effective disabling feature
 - Feedback from users



Limitations

- Mostly white
- Suburban
- Limited range of social classes
- No digital divide
- Particularly bad implementation of filtering

Further Research

- Replicate study
 - Where digital divide is reality
 - Where filters are set at lower levels
 - Where filters are not used



Conclusions

- Filtering can seriously hinder Internet research by high school students
- Communication critical to minimize negative effects of filtering
- Keep overblocking to minimum



Conclusions

- Do not filter based on viewpoint
- Ensure equal access to information – especially in presence of digital divide



Finale

- “It’s more a freedom and ethical issue.”

...well-intentioned but misguided
technology administrator



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