Liesel Theuscch

Ginny Walters

Research Essay

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The Eight Scary Letters: RESEARCH

 When most students hear the intimidating word “research” they may picture a few fangs dangling off of the letters. Others more commonly associated it with white lab coats and test tubes, but class discussions and readings have taught me that there is much more involved than puffs of color and mutants as seen in Dexter’s Laboratory on Cartoon Network. I have come to realize that research can include any question that someone feels is in need of an answer and that there are many skills that any researcher utilizes no matter their area of study. Any researcher is expected to be able to take prior research, along with their knowledge, and build upon it to further society. They are also expected to share credibility to those that it is due. Their ethical conduct is a key aspect to all fields of research. After my time here at Mankato State, I aim to hone my research skills and contribute to my field by participating in research studies that could be used in future classrooms. With this goal in mind, it is critical that I improve my informational literacy skills early in my college career.

 Information literacy is vital to success in all areas of life. According to Patricia Senn Breivik, “…informational literacy is a kind of critical thinking ability…” and this ability is very important as we “…negotiate our information-overloaded existence.” Breivik also created an information literacy diagram that shows informational literacy to include many areas, such as computer, library, and media literacy. The ability to find and comprehend new information with the intent of applying it later on is critical to success in the working world. Breivik cited a Ford Motor Company executive named Donn Cohen who said, “We typically can only find half of the information we need to do our jobs and spend up to 30 percent of our time looking for the other half.” The other half of the information workers need in order to do their jobs is obtained through critical thinking and “information synthesis”, as Breivik refers to it as. Informational literacy is not the only thing that researchers and workers use to further their success. Their ethical practices are just as important.

 Ethical research can be generalized as giving credit to those that have contributed to findings or advances and accurately reporting your own findings. A guide entitled *On Being A Scientist* refers to research as a “…cumulative enterprise in which new research builds on previous results.” In the same source it states that unethical or “…irresponsible actions can impede an entire field of research or send it in a wrong direction.” Even if an individual were to get inconclusive results, it is still important to accurately report their findings in the case that others may observe their findings and further them. I did not associate ethics with research before this class, but without these ethics researchers would appear to be dogs chasing their own tails with false or manipulated results. Without research ethics, society would not be able to progress at the rate that it does. Even though I am a first-year student, conducting ethical research is already important to my college career.

 As a freshman, the eight letters that make up the word research still seem a bit daunting, but not so much as my first day. After attending different informational discussions and participating in class the word seems to be more malleable than I first thought. Already this year, I feel that I have improved my informational literacy and research skills. So far my research has been limited to writing about historical events, but these small projects have made me more familiar with the resources available to me at MSU and the assignments have helped me improve my efficiency when using them. As I move forward in my college career, I hope to research more about problems that interest me, such as those in the educational field. Before I graduate, I would like to conduct research on different teaching methods that I will someday incorporate into my own classroom. That is a very big step from researching for historical essays. Between now and then, I want to conduct more group research. I feel that researching in a group and having the extra resource of discussion will help me synthesize and apply the new information that I find within my sources. In my short time here, I have already expanded my knowledge base and I expect that to continue as I come in contact with more people that share similar interests and curiosity.

 Research is slowly starting to become a feasible concept more than a word containing eight letters with fangs attached. Research is not only conducted in a lab while dressed in white coats and safety goggles, but also people asking the tough questions and pursuing the answers. After discussion and readings, I have come to realize that research can be as personalized as the researcher is willing to make it. The possibilities are endless. All research has to start somewhere, but first the researcher must be informationally literate, ethical in their findings, and willing to continuously push themselves to improve. One great thing about research is that it never ends. There is always another question to ask. That is why this eight letter word, “research,” is slowly morphing from a word with fangs to a word that resembles an open door to endless possibilities.

Works Cited

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