Kim Hooper

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Challenge

- High School Library Media Specialist confronts logistical challenge of reaching and persuading hundreds of teachers spread across a large campus to better use virtual reference materials in the classroom.

- Convince students to use trusted virtual reference materials rather than free but suspect online sources.

Solutions

- *Gale Virtual Reference Library (GVRL)*

Results

- Teachers exposed to *GVRL* and how user friendly it is are increasingly expanding its role in classroom lessons.

- As the *GVRL* collection grows so too does usage which has resulted in higher quality student work and tailored learning experiences.

Librarian uses virtual reference solution to engage students and teachers on sizable campus

Kim Hooper, the Library Media Specialist at John Jay High School in Hopewell Junction, New York, feels like a small fish in a big pond at times. "It's important to use our students' and classroom teachers' time carefully. We must craft students' and classroom teachers' library experiences for maximum impact," Hooper said of the large campus on which she works.

The school, just outside New York City, is home to more than 2,100 students and 200 teachers. While Hooper is able to reach students during study halls and regular library walk-in hours, the sheer size of John Jay High poses logistical challenges with which even a nine-year high school library veteran like Hooper struggles.

The large campus makes it difficult for Hooper to reach each student and acquaint them with the resources available in their own library. Despite the classroom attached to her library, Hooper had noticed students referencing suspect internet sources in their work rather than the trusted sources housed in library materials.

But reaching both students and teachers in such an environment is a challenge that's being overcome thanks to virtual reference materials Hooper can easily make available anywhere and anytime.

Teacher Usage of *GVRL* Increases Despite Logistical Challenges

Technology has helped Hooper intelligently craft a strategy designed to increase teacher engagement. "I go right for the low hanging fruit." Hooper said, referring to teachers who have already used a virtual reference material product.

Hooper understands once teachers use Cengage Learning's *Gale Virtual Reference Library (GVRL),* a cloud-based platform that provides digital research and educational resources to libraries, they're much more likely to experiment with and use additional Gale resources.

Hooper, in accordance with her library's mission statement that "information is power", provides teachers with as much information as possible. "I've always been impressed because Gale products are extremely easy to use," she said. "It's easy for me to teach our teachers how to use Gale products because the user interface is so well done and user-centric."

For instance, Hooper has identified ways to collaborate with teachers that help them incorporate *GVRL* into the personal web sites teachers are required to maintain. "I show them how easy it is to grab URLs and ebooks and link to articles or databases right there on their personal web sites," she said.

Rising Student *GVRL* Use Results in Higher Quality School Work

It's actually the students and their work at John Jay High who are attracting more teachers to the Gale suite of products. "There's been a 1,200% increase in eBook usage in the last six years," Hooper remarked. "Students are definitely using it quite a bit."

Prior to widespread *GVRL* student adoption, Hooper had become concerned by the internet sources students were citing in their class work. "Before you'd see nothing but Wikipedia and About.com which is the same junk over and over," Hooper said. "Now students use various Gale databases and sources and get a richer experience."

Besides being reliable, the *GVRL* resources students cite in their work are also constructed in ways that make them engagingly balanced. While academic in nature, Hooper suggests the material appeals to students because it's topical and concrete without being boring.

Tailored Learning Experiences Emerge as *GVRL* Collection Grows

Hooper's message to students regarding *GVRL* is unambiguous. "Hey, it's a one-stop shop," she says. "I've got all this stuff for their projects so there's no need to weed through a bunch of junk on the free web."

As Hooper's collection has grown to several hundred books, Hooper says *GVRL* allows teachers to create tailored student learning experiences. "That's my big selling point," Hooper said, referring to the citations that appear at the end of each article. "I do love that I can create subcollections that are relevant to individual students. It's just great one-stop shopping."