Daniel Russo
LRC Director & District LRC Coordinator, Batavia High School, Batavia, Illinois

Usage increases as librarian repeatedly exposes students to digital resources

Daniel Russo, LRC Director at Batavia High School just west of Chicago, was recently confronted with a problem librarians nationwide face; how to get students to actually use the digital materials schools purchase. "We don't just buy the databases," Russo said. "We teach students how to use them."

It's why Russo, a former English teacher, spends so much time at the head of the classroom. He understands student engagement increases dramatically when students are assigned provocative research projects that require them to create, defend, argue, and invent rather than simply list facts. It's why freshmen at Batavia High are introduced to the library's digital resources immediately.

"We teach each freshman how to use the databases in a required cultural studies class," Russo said. The key, according to Russo, is reinforcing the training students initially receive. "Students aren't just exposed to the databases once. They're exposed each year and get real use out of the databases."

It's a type of immersion program that engages students early and often and lays a foundation for future achievement.
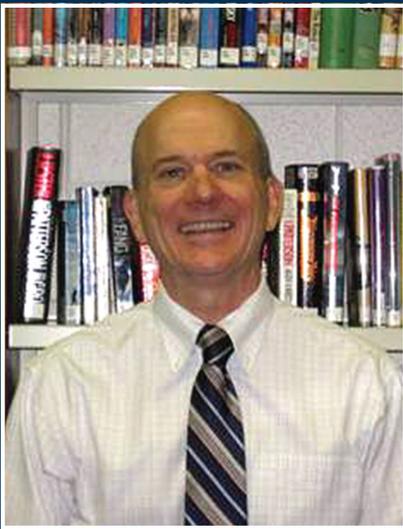
ENGAGEMENT SPIKES AS DIGITAL COLLECTION GROWS AND STUDENTS ADVANCE

Russo sees the library as a conduit between students and the resources they need to grow intellectually. However, what sets Russo's library apart is its mission to emphasize the virtual resources available to students.

As Russo's digital collection has grown, he cites Cengage Learning's *Gale Virtual Reference Library* (GVRL), a cloud-based platform that provides digital research and educational resources to libraries, as a prime example of a tool designed to engage and maintain student attention. "I love Gale products," Russo boasted. "They're just so spot-on and exactly what students need."

Russo is particularly impressed with two aspects of Gale's digital platform. First, the products are visually appealing which helps attract and keep student attention. "The quality of the product is wonderful," Russo said. "They are so visually appealing and that's how you have to appeal to students today."

Second, Russo says the Gale suite of products solves the one-size fits all problem plaguing other products on the market. GVRL allows educators to acquire materials that range in difficulty and meet the needs of individual students. "The ability to meet different students' levels is a big plus," Russo added.

CHALLENGES

- Ensuring students use the digital resources purchased and convincing them to increase engagement as the collection grows
- Using virtual reference collection to measurably improve student achievement

SOLUTION

- Gale Virtual Reference Library (GVRL)

RESULTS

- Usage increases throughout students' high school careers as a result of GVRL immersion program, advertising campaign, and tailored learning experiences
- Student achievement increases as a result of digital materials being customizable, highly relevant, and accessible anytime and anywhere

---

GALE CENGAGE Learning®

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT RISES AS VIRTUAL REFERENCE MATERIALS ARE LEVERAGED

A library's digital collection will not generate a return unless it results in greater student achievement. Besides showing students how to properly cite and organize the materials they find on GVRL, Russo says the platform allows educators to intervene in real time should they identify weaknesses in a student's research process.

Students are also treated to a customized package of virtual reference material when working in Russo's library. "Text-to-speech and citation tools enable students to customize and enhance their own database experience," Russo said. "GVRL isn't a set package which means we can customize it to the curriculum needs. It truly is our virtual library."

Part of customizing the learning experience is ensuring students are exposed to timely and project-specific databases. For instance, Russo recommends specific databases that complement teacher assignments and requests for physical assets. "When a teacher requests a cart of books for a student brainstorming session, it's an opportunity for me to let them know we have databases that are perfect for the assignment," Russo said.

The result is a richer learning experience that yields higher quality student research skills that endure.

AROUND THE CLOCK USAGE POPULAR FOLLOWING ADVERTISING EFFORT

The Gale platform allows librarians like Russo to monitor database usage and adjust accordingly. For example, Batavia High's 2,000 students logged into Gale databases more than 1,400 times and made more than 3,500 search inquiries during a recent month. During the first semester of the school year, students logged into the Gale database 13,134 times and conducted 26,835 searches. "User friendly reporting formats make this information easily available," Russo says. With Gale statistics, Russo can even see that students are accessing the databases at 4:00 A.M. on days before major projects are due, demonstrating to school administration that databases are really being utilized and impacting student learning.

"We're constantly reminding them they have 24/7 access," Russo said. Students are provided identification credentials and passwords so they can access databases from their homes, on weekends, or even holidays. Russo credits the home use and general database interest to an advertising effort underway at the school. "We're reinforcing the idea that students should take their passwords home with them," he said. "We periodically send announcements, tweets, and messages to parents about new databases students can access anytime and anywhere."

"I believe the databases offer tremendous value for our investment," says Russo. "A print reference book is only available to one student at a time. With GVRL, a whole class can use the same article at the same time."

Source Code: M15009890