Debunking the Myth of the Google Generation – Nicky Adkins

Notes

1. We all know that there’s no such thing as the Google Generation, but sadly many teachers think that there is. This is largely because many teachers lack confidence using the internet for research, and they see the students tapping merrily away and form a common misconception:

2. That confidence equals ability, which of course it doesn’t. In fact most student ability fairly closely matches that of their teachers.

3. The problem that we face in the library is the ‘stick it into Google’ school of research. The question’s typed in, the first result is copy and pasted out, and that’s accepted as homework, they’re given the mark for it.

4. But there’s also the student misconception that more is always better.

5. The difficulty for us is that the power lies with the mark book. Why should students listen to us, asking them to do more work when they can avoid the whole thing and get a tick anyway? The key thing here is getting teachers on board, but they’re over worked, stressed out, and sick to death of having new stuff thrust at them. They really don’t want to hear ‘You could do this…’

6. What they need to hear is ‘I’ll do it for you.’ I’ve been going in with a box of resources all set to go, with knowledge of the syllabus and relevant parts of the mark scheme. These have been mini-echo chamber escapes, as teaching these skills from the library hasn’t worked; they were then seen as a library skill. But by taking this into the classroom, it becomes a curriculum skill. Must be subject specific.

7. So, how? We often start with the Google Game, where students are given a basic list of Google techniques and are given points (or chocolates – the only things with more power than a mark book) for finding the fewest results. At this point I also give them a list of trusted sites that they might want to investigate. Again, these must be subject specific. Teachers start to think at this point when they realise that they didn’t know this. And it’s now that they’ll hopefully start tea leafing your resources for themselves.

8. There’s still the problem of evaluation. Teachers don’t really know how to evaluate sites either. So…

9. The centrefold of the handout is a simple and easy to follow flow chart that leads them through various criteria to evaluate a website and decide whether it’s suitable for use or not. But for some students this is still asking them to run before they can walk, so we’ve been putting together pathfinders for them.

10. Livebinders collects together a set of resources and essentially binds them together for you. This also encourages students to begin to organise their research and can even act as a writing frame, providing a structure for their final piece.

11. For the older students or those who are more able, we’ve been using Pearltrees, which does essentially the same thing, but looks that bit more appealing and makes students feel that there is more discovery for them there. They can then create their own and join it up to yours.

12. Students sometimes ask though, if they’re given a set of sites to look at ‘Is this research?’ They’re good at the search part, but they’ve forgotten about the ‘re’.
13. So to turn it into proper research we’ve been looking at ways of getting them to record and then use information, using Diigo and Evernote. Having them use Diigo has been quite revolutionary, as there ar a surprising number of students who don’t use bookmarks at all, they’ll just type the name of the site they’re looking for into Google. So getting them to start recording them and tagging them has been superb. They found their way around the site in no time at all and started forming groups on there, which led to some completely independent peer review of their link selections, where students complained to others that they hadn’t evaluated their sites sufficiently before saving them. Evernote has been great for them and has worked in a way I didn’t expect: they’re using it as a copy and paste intermediary, and then taking their work from there. It’s also helping them to record data for their bibliographies.

14. The great this is that this is all working! I’ve been working with a lower ability core Science group on their case studies, and all the students are expected to max out on the research part of the assessment.