

Carolyn Boyle of the Melbourne University Library Chat Service stated that the reference interview was often used. She mentioned that in most cases the reference interview was not formal. In particular, it is used at Melbourne University Library when the question is unclear. Staff members extract further information by asking the user questions such as whether the student is interested in a particular collection or subject area.

The type of queries received by the chat service range from the complex to basic IT or difficulties with catalogue search. If, for example, a student finds that an electronic resource is not working, the librarian will ask the user to take him or her through the steps to get to the point where difficulties occurred.

In Carolyn Boyle's experience, the user, especially the first year student, is not frightened away when a reference interview is conducted online. In fact, the user is less likely to be inhibited with the virtual reference interview than with a face-to-face exchange.

All three librarians alluded to or stated that a form of reference interview was often given when the patron asked a question in person. Staff at Melbourne University Library regularly used the interview in virtual reference, but staff at Monash Public Library and the Royal Melbourne Hospital Health Sciences Library seldom did. This is a mere glance at virtual reference interview practice in Melbourne. The interview in digital reference may not be dead, but it may just be endangered.

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1. Nilsen, Kirsti and Ross, Catherine Sheldrick, (2006), "Evaluating virtual reference from the users' perspective," *The Reference Librarian*, 95/96, p. 67.

## HSC workshops at Coffs Harbour City library

HSC exams are a serious business. Public libraries try their best to make HSC panic-free for students. The *HSC and Education Forum 2008* and *Reference@Metcalf seminar*, both held at the State Library of NSW, motivated us to prepare workshops for HSC students.

The year advisors of local schools were invited to book one hour workshops for year 11 classes, from 22-26 September 2008. Approximately 60 local students attended the three workshops and others will be attending sessions early next year.

The workshop held at the library included showing features of our library catalogue, databases, HSC related websites, and services that provide online help. The display of items included reference resources, literary works in several formats, study guides and infocus articles.

The databases shown were:

- Britannica Online
- Facts on file - History Online
- Facts on file - Science Online
- Science Reference Centre,



*Surinder Kaur and some of the students who attended the HSC workshops*

- GreenFile
- Bloom's Literary Reference Online
- Literary Reference Centre,
- Novelist

The websites highlighted were:

- CSU's HSC online
- Inside Break
- Sparknotes
- Infocus
- State Library NSW HSC English
- Legal Information and Access Centre

Online help services promoted were:

- *yourtutor* – service by subscription
- *AskNow* – free virtual library service

The workshop started by brainstorming to help students realise that the pathway to success for the HSC starts with good listening, note making and time management. Study and exams section of CSU's *HSC online* website was promoted to help improve these skills.

We did a live demonstration of *yourtutor*, a commercially-available service that the library subscribes to. Students were also familiarised with *AskNow* service so they had wider access to help, especially during school holidays and within school hours when *yourtutor* is not available.

The highlights of eight online databases were shown. The students appreciated *Britannica online's* web's best sites, articles from journals and magazines and multimedia files. *History online* had primary documents to impress students. *Science online* which includes mathematics also had biographies and a science dictionary.

Three literary databases were relevant for Standard and Advanced English. They provide not only a synopsis, criticism and biography of authors but they also connect works by themes and give information on the genre of writing.

There was so much to cover in one hour. Each database and website was limited to three minutes. To make it more relevant for the students, we chose examples from the HSC syllabus. Showing the features of the library website was important too. Judy Atkinson, the Programs Officer, and I worked together to keep the students focused the whole time.



Participating students were given show bags. The teachers said that they will definitely bring more classes next year. Commenting on the workshop, one teacher said, "Oh, there is so much information. I think I will come in school holidays and find out more information myself".

It was a very rewarding experience for us. Now we promote these databases and websites whenever we get an opportunity while answering reference enquiries. We are confident that the use of our databases will increase and our customers will get value for the money spent.

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## Reference outreach and digital literacy at Ashfield Library

Like most public libraries, the Ashfield Library spends a lot of time and money on developing online resources and, like most public libraries, we want them to be cost effective and time efficient. In a venture to increase use and awareness of these tools, a plan was hatched to trial an outreach program into our local schools.

The plan was to target grades 4, 6 and 10. Each audience group is very different and requires a separate method of implementation. A meeting was held with the Teacher Librarian to establish the curriculum needs and the appropriate level of information for each grade.

With grade 4, we focussed on fun and help. We explored the World Wide Web, learned how to decipher URL addresses, played with the council website and the library *Pretxts* Blog, then finished with a discussion of the flaws of parents. Why is it that parents never know how to do Grade 4 homework—didn't they pass Grade 4?! We then 'played' with the *yourtutor* program: it was a snap, and she knew all the Grade 4 homework. Most of the students had experience with the web and some had even had chat sessions before. If only Grade 6 could have been that much fun!

Grade 6 didn't seem to think it was that much 'fun' to play with a librarian on the web. They all spent at least an hour a day on the web, but some were shocked to discover that the URL actually told you something about the site. We actually got rather sidetracked on the discussion of how to evaluate and decide to 'trust' a website, that we never made it into all the databases. We looked at ANZRC, which a few of the more studious sorts found interesting. Many of the others found free magazine articles moderately entertaining, except for one young man who was ecstatic and couldn't wait to show his mum that *Woman's Day* is all free on the library website. We flew through the Blog and ended with a quick *yourtutor* preview.

Now I must confess that 12 classes of Grade 4 and 6 over two weeks had this librarian exhausted and I am yet to tackle Grade 10. The Plan for Grade 10 is to try and shift their focus for research and homework materials from the web and into databases, and of course detour via the Blog with finally the *yourtutor* program.

I must also say that it is essential to supply notes for everything you want them to remember—lots of short and plain English ones. The class can't take notes, interact with your digital presentation and keep a cracking pace all at once. It is also important to break the session into 10-minute lots: attention spans get stretched and you will always be fighting with a myriad of distractions. I prefer to have one computer with a projector, and then to take turns with an assistant. Probably the most important thing is—don't forget the rewards. I use magnetic bookmarks with the council website on them.

Working with the schools has been very profitable for our library and the school. Ashfield Library has experienced a jump in the use of the purchased tutoring program and a small shift in use of the databases. The students received confirmation that what their Teacher Librarian is trying to impart is important information, and also found out about some free homework help they didn't know they could get. And the Teacher Librarian got to see some of the resources that the public library provides to the community, and of course a greater understanding of the educational support that is available from public libraries. If you can get into the local classroom, it is a very worthwhile venture.

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