Sense-Making and the Community College Student

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Recommended Citation
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Purpose
A qualitative pilot study is underway at Queensborough Community College - The City University of New York to explore the information behaviors of community college students in the context of an assigned research task.

Background
Queensborough Community College (QCC)
• Fall 2016 enrollment – 15,569 students
• Diverse urban campus with students from 129 countries, speaking 78 languages
• 79% of all full-time, full-time freshmen receive financial grant aid
• 72% of incoming freshmen require at least one remedial course
• 79% of all first-time, full-time freshmen receive financial grant aid

Dervin’s Sense-Making Theory of Information Behavior
This project is framed using Dervin’s Sense-Making Theory of Information Behavior (Dervin, 1998). Community college students are interviewed and asked to reconstruct their experience in the completion of a research assignment. Per Dervin’s model, the assignment is conceived as a time-space journey, and the journey is comprised of a series of student-conceptualized SITUATIONS and GAPS, BRIDGES and OUTCOMES.

Research Questions
RQ1 How do community college students make sense of research assignments?
RQ2 What role does the academic library play in community college students’ sense-making processes?

Methods
Participants
• QCC students enrolled in ENGL101 – English Composition I, a three-credit required course, during Fall 2017 semester
• Recruited from 13 ENGL101 sections taught by 8 QCC English Department faculty which required a research paper assignment and which attended at least one information literacy session taught by QCC Library Department faculty

Data Collection
• 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews
• Data collected using Sense-Making’s micromoment time-line interview technique (Dervin, 1983); subjects asked to describe their experience in completing the ENGL101 research assignment
• Each 60-minute interview audio recorded and professionally transcribed
• Each participant received $50 METRO card upon completion of interview

Data Analysis
• Phase II: “In Vivo” coding of Subject 1-14 transcripts with Analytic Memo technique (Guest et. al, 2012)
• “Content” coding of Subject 1-14 transcript – in-progress (Guest et. al, 2012)
• “In Vivo” coding of Subject 1-7 transcripts – in-progress (Guest et. al, 2012)

Phase I Results (Subjects 1-7)

HELP: Confidence
“Don’t feel embarrassed if you don’t know something. I feel like college is not about the smartest person in the world, I feel like you just have to deal with who’s ability to do the work.” – S1 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-N)

HINDRANCE: Language
“Integrated quotes. I didn’t really understand what he meant by that… I didn’t get to ask him. I kind of just skipped over that.” – S2 (IP-USWF, PC-F, AI-T)

HELP: Practice
“…you’d be like alright, so this looks like a doing something new but it’s not about the smartest person in the world, I feel like if you don’t understand what you’re doing…” – S3 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)

HINDRANCE: Confidence
“I look at the rubric and I look at what the professor wants from the assignment, you can’t do the assignment if you don’t understand what you’re doing.” – S4 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)

HELP: Rubric
“I look at the rubric and I look at what the professor wants from the assignment, you can’t do the assignment if you don’t understand what you’re doing.” – S5 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)

HINDRANCE: Language
“I look at the rubric and I look at what the professor wants from the assignment, you can’t do the assignment if you don’t understand what you’re doing.” – S6 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)

HINDRANCE: Complexity
“I feel like if you don’t know what you’re doing…” – S7 (IP-USWF, PC-F, AI-T)

HELP: Practice
“I feel like if you don’t know what you’re doing…” – S1 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)

HINDRANCE: Language
“I feel like if you don’t know what you’re doing…” – S2 (IP-USWF, PC-F, AI-T)

HINDRANCE: Confidence
“I feel like if you don’t know what you’re doing…” – S3 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)

HELP: Practice
“I feel like if you don’t know what you’re doing…” – S4 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)

HINDRANCE: Complexity
“I feel like if you don’t know what you’re doing…” – S5 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)

REFERENCES
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