

Graduate Library Research Award Essay

This research group was formed on the collective desire to learn more about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the students we teach in kindergarten, first, and second grades. As graduate students in Northern California, the Zoom tour, offered by William H. Hannon Library, guided us in using the online databases and services and was an invaluable resource. We began looking for research related to COVID-19 and discovered there was limited information available on this new topic and we would need to broaden our scope of study. Our search was expanded to include student engagement and Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Through the guidance of our professor, Dr. Maryann Krikorian, and additional support from Elisa Acosta, education librarian, and Clinton Carl, faculty writing tutor, we further developed our topic of study to include how SEL impacted the engagement of students who experienced the COVID-19 pandemic.

We evaluated the relevance of scholarly articles to learn how our research about the COVID-19 pandemic, SEL, engagement, and the early elementary classroom would contribute to the field of education. To efficiently review literature, we divided research topics amongst each researcher. One difficulty encountered was the limited research available on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and SEL in relation to students. We used synonyms and the Boolean method to aid us in search efforts. Another difficulty that arose was accessing material that wasn't available digitally. Without a LMU OneCard, which we previously didn't need, we were told material couldn't be sent to us. Additionally, there was an even greater challenge to secure scholarly studies that specifically pertained to early elementary students and COVID-19. Although there were some hurdles in our research, we found success locating a multitude of studies that focused on SEL and supported our refined research topic.

The virtual library tour highlighted the different resource databases available, including ERIC, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. Our most beneficial resources for scholarly articles were

obtained through PsycINFO because of the ability to refine searches and locate articles that were more specific to SEL and engagement. One resource that was advantageous to our research was the consultation with Clinton Carl, faculty writing tutor. Clinton guided us in developing our literature review research and writing and introduced us to Zotero, which helped us curate a collection of literature and references that we were able to access from our different geographical locations. Another resource regularly utilized was the “Ask A Librarian” chat feature on the library website. This valuable tool helped locate difficult to access articles and provided an immediate response which didn’t halt the flow of our work as we developed our literature review.

Evaluating information wasn’t a new concept to us as teachers, but reviewing literature from an evaluative, research-based perspective was a skill we had to develop. We chose to include only peer-reviewed literature to increase credibility. Then we looked at the reference lists in those sources to find additional relevant literature. The EBSCOhost database condensed our search to peer-reviewed articles and journals within the field of education. Determining if website sources were credible was challenging. We examined multiple websites before selecting sources and used our collective opinions to choose the most relevant ones. Another challenge we faced was finding abstracts that looked promising, but lacked access to a full article. Throughout our literature review we were conscious that our study would focus on a select population and include research gaps; we were mindful that similar bias could occur in other studies as well. One resource selected was a study from Turkey where the educational values of the Turkish culture may not align with Western educational philosophies. We opted to include this study to offer an alternative viewpoint from our own and it was one of the few studies that looked at the effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on students.

The support we received from LMU faculty and staff, in navigating this research process, was invaluable. We learned to analyze and evaluate literature to determine the relevancy and contribution it had to the field of education. As we move forward as educators, we will utilize the tools we have acquired to remain life-long learners.