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**Subject access in school library OPAC: what do children think about it?**

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**Introduction.** Subject access to information in the network environment becomes more and more important. Library users’ studies of OPACs show how users browse mostly by searching for documents by their subject (Long 2000, 159-186). Subject searching of a document is very useful in case user doesn’t know an author’s name or a title of the book. Subject catalogue and subject searching play crucial role in helping students find resources on their school assignments. Subject headings systems are well known for not meeting the needs of adult users, and especially children (Beak 2015). Several authors (Solomon 1994, Borgman et al. 1995; Harris 2004, Creel 2014) did research on children and OPAC searching and results in general showed that children are not able to use library catalogues while they are not designed for them in the first place. Since school libraries in Croatia provide access to library collections via OPACs this research aims to find out what do children think about subject indexing and subject searching in online catalogues. Three research questions were asked in the research: *1) How do the students label the content/assign keywords for searching?* 2) *What do students think about the catalogue search and what are their attitudes towards subject indexing?* and *3) Comparison of students’ keywords and subject headings found in Croatian OPACs.* The purpose of the research is to stress the importance of the subject indexing in the modern school library and to enrich it by exploiting the possibilities of student participation in the creation of subject labels/keywords

**Methodology.** This work is a part of a more extensive diploma thesis research involving the students' attitudes towards the subject indexing and subject searching in the school library. Qualitative research method used in the study was focus group. Students were given samples (titles from the books and periodicals) used for the school assignments, extracted from their curriculum. Students' suggestions of keywords were analysed and compared with the subject headings found in the Croatian library catalogue systems (Crolist, Zaki and MetelWin). Parents were notified and signed permission for participation in this research.

**Results.** To answer the first research question the following is stated:

* the students described the given examples in detail and extensively, both books and periodicals;
* the students described the given examples in one word, phrase (syntagm) and/or a sentence, and they said library publications should be described by language used by their age (ie. elementary school children);
* while describing the contents of the publication, students use different terms of expression: from one word or concept through the syntagm to the sentence; sometimes they describe the layout of the book and express a personal opinion about the value of the publication;

To answer the second research question the following is stated:

* students believe that online catalogues must offer more subject headings and keywords and they stated that it is important how the catalogue looks; they want vibrant and visually appealing pages made specially for children (eg. like ICDL);
* subject indexing and subject searching students find to be very useful and they express the wish that their school library also has an online catalogue;
* students consider to be useful to include children in subject indexing/assigning keywords to library materials to help them use language appropriate and understandable to children their age and comprehension.

On the third question, answer is as in previous similar studies,

* students' suggestions mostly do not match or only partially match the subjects within the Crolist and MetelWin catalogues and partially match the tags used by Zaki.

**Discussion.** The interview with the students in the focus group and the analysis of the catalogues indicate that more attention should be paid to subject indexing in the online catalogues of elementary school libraries in Croatia. The catalogues should be more attractive to students – visually appealing and tailored to the taste of elementary school pupils. It is also evident that the students apply keywords in detailed way and their suggestions do not generally match results in the catalogues. Subject headings are structured, controlled and should be objective. These criteria are not always met while children assign subjects to a publication. Similar to Harris's research in public libraries (Harris 2004), pupils participating in the focus group find useful online catalogues and subject searches, but highlighted small number of subject headings and keywords and stressed that they must be appropriate to their age (and language). The results of this research confirmed findings of Bilal and Kirby (2002, 667) who concluded that more subject headings would improve recall and encourage students for independent library catalogue searching. According to that it is very likely that the enriched catalogue record would encourage students to use catalogues more frequently and enable more efficient independent searching and seeking for titles on topics within school curriculum which is very important in modern learning based on inquiry. The interface of the catalogue is also very important for students, and should be designed for children – to be visually attractive. The International Children's Digital Library is example of such ‘children appropriate’ system.

**Conclusions.** School libraries should not neglect the fact that today's users are mostly searching for documents according to their subject and how subject access to information becomes more and more important. In this particular case, introduction of online catalogue in school library is an opportunity to organize it in a way that is accessible and useful to students – users. A well-organized catalogue with satisfying subject access (subject headings with keywords appropriate to school children) can be a good basis for encouraging inquiry-based learning and fulfilling the vision of a contemporary school library as Carol Kuhlthau (2010, 17) has set it as a "dynamic learning centre in the school's information age" through numerous sources and communication channels.

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