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People Profile: Barbara DeFelice

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collection gaps, since this is an earth systems collection. The assumption that the audience would want to find place based educational materials was supported in our analysis.

DLESE allows a user to search a broad topic and combine topics with terms for Resource Type or Grade Level, but when users just blended all those in one search string, the search did not produce results. In some cases, there really was nothing in the collection that covered that topic and that particular resource type or grade level assigned. In others, it was not possible to discover the material that way. An example is “Pictures of sea animals, big ones, for second graders to draw for classroom project.” Besides the educational resources collection that we were assessing, DLESE has several different components which can be searched. Users sometime do not make a distinction between the domain of educational resources and the domain of administrative information. So names of people involved with DLESE were not discoverable in the educational resources collection. Some searches combined various elements of these categories.

This categorization alone would not help us isolate collection gaps. Some searches in these categories would have found results if constructed differently. For example, null searches for people’s names are not useful for identifying collection gaps. But zero result searches that combined terms for Resource Type and Grade Level might be useful as guides on where to focus collection building. Since it was not easy to isolate the reasons for the zero result geographic searches, it seems reasonable to both add place specific materials and supplement the geographic terms as much as possible. There were many searches that did not fall into any of these categories and these may point to collection gaps. This simply means that if a search did not fall into one of our categories, that topic provides a good starting place for further investigations, such as looking at logs of user requests for materials or looking at other collection depth indicators. However, it may be more costly to do further research than it might be to refocus collection building in the areas indicated by the zero result logs.

Despite the growth in the size of the collection and number of users, the percent of all searches that retrieve null results remained fairly steady and has not decreased in the way we expected. (FIGURE 2)

FIGURE 2: Null results as a percent of all searches, changes over time.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of searches and browses on the metadata elements of Subject, Resource Type, and Grade Level was most helpful for determining gaps in types of resources, such as the need for audio materials, or grade levels, such as the need for more K-12 materials. Null search analysis was the best approach to understand subject area gaps. In the DLESE case, knowing what the collection contained and what users wanted helped us adjust the collection development focus over time. At best, this kind of analysis only leads to clues about the materials needed and the paths that users take to find them in a specific digital library. However, we should not ignore those clues. It was clear that the collection needed materials that covered a much wider range of geographic areas and that the metadata needed to describe the geographic areas covered at many different levels. Zero continued on page 38