University of Toronto Libraries Undergraduate Research Prize: Reflective Statement

Katya Smirnova
Prior to beginning my research project on sport for development (SFD) and outdoor education (OE), I attended a library workshop through the KPE390 course during which Erica Lenton, an instruction librarian, taught attendees about the basic research principles and strategies that we could use for our projects. Based on her lecture, I gained a better understanding of the balance between precision and sensitivity and how these two concepts significantly affect a key word search. I also learned about PICO—an acronym used to direct a research question in order to further identify topics that should be focused on in a key word search. PICO stands for population, intervention, comparison and outcomes. Using PICO, I was able to narrow my search criteria because I knew exactly what questions I was trying to answer in my research project.

Although I had learned how to better conduct a key word search based on the principles outlined by Erica, I struggled to use her guidance because her workshop focused mostly on clinical science research for kinesiology students. To gain a further understanding of researching for my specific project, I sent Erica an email concerning social-science research. She suggested I narrow my key word searches to the following databases: ERIC, Sociological Abstracts and PROQUEST. I also asked peers who were doing research in the social sciences which databases they used, and, JSTOR was recommended, which I added to my database list. Using these subject specific databases narrowed my search for relevant sources, but it did so to such an extent that my searches resulted in very few sources.

I then went to Robarts and made an appointment with librarian Christina Santolin. Together we created a new search, including Boolean operators, textword codes and controlled vocabularies. My new search was:
SU.EXACT(“Outdoor Recreation”) OR ti((outdoor* OR enviro* OR nature*) NEAR/3 (education* OR learn*)) OR ab((outdoor* OR enviro* OR nature*) NEAR/3 (education* OR learn*))

OR

"outdoor education" OR ((outdoor OR experiential OR natur*) W/3 (learn* OR educat*)) AND (develop* OR SDP OR (sport W/3 develop*)).

With my new search terms and textword codes, I used the databases I already named along with the U of T library OneSearch in an attempt to find a breadth of research. I was still not able to find enough information on outdoor education and sport for development together. I came to the conclusion that there is a gap in the literature regarding these two topics and that I would therefore have to do research on each topic separately.

To find SFD literature, I read articles from my sport for development class (KPE401) that I had taken the previous year, and looked through their reference sections to find more suitable articles and books for my particular project. To find OE articles, I started by finding books in the library catalogue about outdoor recreation and education, and then used their reference sections to find more suitable articles and books for my project. I ended up with literature from online academic journal articles, books that I signed out from the U of T library system and sometimes online newspaper articles when I needed to reference popular culture. I evaluated the quality of each source by attempting to use mainly academic articles that were peer reviewed and from reputable academic journals. I also tried to find articles that were newer so that they would have the most up-to-date information regarding SFD and OE, though older research was also necessary to evaluate the history and growth of these two fields.

Once I had found 30-40 references for each subject, I read through the abstracts of each article and the table of contents of each book, looking for key words such as development,
sport, social work, etc. to narrow down my references. I ensured that I had a variety of references from different publication years, countries, and publication types to allow for multiple perspectives to appear in my literature review. Although most of my references were from academic journals or books, one was from a social work conference and one was a forest service assessment. My sources also included grey literature such as a report from Active Healthy Kids Canada. Once I had a narrowed list of references, yet a broad reach in terms of sources, I was able to begin reading each reference thoroughly. I mainly read the chapters of books that I thought would be most important, using sticky notes to mark pages that might be useful for my literature review and making notes on specific quotations. I categorized each piece of information as either OE- or SFD-related and made sub-categories within each subject.

Once I had read each article and the sections of each book that I deemed useful, I was able to write my literature review. I used APA 6th edition format for my citations and reference section which I generated through Refworks. To do this I clicked the ‘save’ check box for each of my references on the U of T libraries webpage then exported them all to Refworks. I hand-typed the sources that were not exportable to Refworks, such as news articles, using the criteria outlined on the OWL Purdue website.

Although it was originally difficult to find sources regarding SFD and OE, I used the library resources and staff to aid me in my research process. Using a variety of search techniques, including various databases and key word searches, I was able to conclude that there is a large gap in the literature about SFD and OE together. Therefore, I reviewed literature about both SFD and OE separately to acknowledge this gap and began my research project in an attempt to address this interdisciplinary divide.