

information literacy: 20 years later

The first information literacy model to be published in the United States was one done by Barbara Stripling and Judy Pitts in their book, *Brainstorms and Blueprints*, published by Libraries Unlimited in 1988, exactly 20 years ago. This book was followed soon by the publication of the Big Six™ Model by Michael Eisenberg and Bob Berkowitz. Thus, we have been working on the teaching and learning of information literacy for two decades in the United States and Canada.

During this time, the focus of the school library media program changed from reading to the teaching of the research process. Classroom teachers during this period expected that research resulting in some type of product would be one of the expected parts of the curriculum of language arts, social studies, and to some extent science and the fine arts.

However, during the last eight years of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandated by the U.S. government, many teachers have abandoned a regular research unit in favor of covering content mandated by state standards. Teacher-librarians have noted this decline and report an increasingly difficult time in becoming an integral part of the curriculum.

FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENTS

Propelling information literacy forward, The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) published *Information Power I* in 1988 followed by *Information Power II* published in 1998. A new set of guidelines based on the new AASL Learning Standards document is due to be published soon.

Currently, there is a set of foundational documents that every teacher-librarian needs to know and deeply understand as we move into the next decade. We list them as a checklist for study:

1. AASL's Standards for the 21st Century Learner (available for download from the AASL web site). This document is the foundational and theoretical replacement for the information literacy model published as part of *Information Power* released by the American Library Association under the authorship of AASL and AECT. These learning standards are the foundation of a guidelines document to be published by AASL either late 2008 or early 2009. These new learning standards are much wider in scope than those they replace. They emphasize in addition to a research process, the building of attitude/dispositions, work ethic, and reading skill. The standards also are centered in the ideals of inquiry as opposed to the emphasis on direct teaching, the central element of NCLB. Thus, they are running on parallel tracks and are more closely aligned to movements such as Understanding by Design popularized by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2005).

2. Partnership for 21st Century Learning Skills. "The Intellectual and Policy Foundation of the 21st Century Skills Framework" at: http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/route21/images/stories/epapers/skills_foundations_final.pdf. This important white paper sets forth the position of the Partnership in a very persuasive manner. The Partnership, of which AASL is a member, stresses three core skill sets surrounding content knowledge: life and career skills, learning and innovation skills, and information media

and technology skills. Their document repository is known as Route 21 and is available at <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org>

3. International Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Literacy Panel. "Digital Transformation: A Framework for ICT Literacy." Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Services, 2007. Available at: http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/Information_and_Communication_Technology_Literacy/ictreport.pdf. Known and quoted as ICT literacy, this report promotes four major literacies as Access—knowing about and knowing how to collect and/or retrieve information; Manage—applying an existing organizational or classification scheme; and Integrate—interpreting and representing information. It involves summarizing, comparing, and contrasting; Evaluate—making judgments about the quality, relevance, usefulness, or efficiency of information; Create—generating information by adapting, applying, designing, inventing, or authoring information.

4. *Information Literacy: An International State-of-the-Art Report*, Second Draft, May 2007, published by the Information Literacy Section of IFLA, and available from UNESCO at <http://www.infolitglobal.info/>. This report traces the international efforts of the information literacy "movement" and, while it contains a weak summary of developments in the United States and Canada, it does contain interesting descriptions of other efforts around the world.

RESEARCH: FOUNDATION OF INFORMATION LITERACY

1. David V. Loertscher and Blanche Woolls. *Information Literacy: A Review of the Research*. 2nd ed. (available from <http://lmcsource.com>). This is the most comprehensive collection and analysis of the research up to 2002. Since that pinnacle year, not many studies have been published. It seems more scholars have turned toward looking at technology and social networking.

2. Daniel Callison and Leslie Preddy. *The Blue Book on Information Age Inquiry, Instruction, and Literacy*. A major collection of documents, articles, techniques, and strategies that is central to the concept of information literacy as understood to date.

ISSUES UNRESOLVED

After two decades of development and research, one would expect that information literacy would have come into its own as a central tenet of education. The Partnership for 21st-Century Skills recognizes information literacy as part of a larger picture and that bodes well for our profession, giving it prominence and legitimacy outside school librarianship. However, a number of central issues have yet to be resolved if more progress is to be made. Here are a few of these issues below:

1. Is the research process a la the Big Six™, the central element of the contribution of the teacher-librarian to the curriculum, or is there a broader mission to teach other literacies such as media literacy, technology literacy, critical thinking, creativity, and reading skill in addition to other emerging literacies?

2. Should a progression of information literacy skills be taught at each grade level and assessed as one would teach a math or science course culminating in a standardized test?

3. Should information literacy and other literacies be integrated into the curriculum of the classroom as those literacies are demanded by the various state content standards? And, should this integration be a part of a systematic collaboration on the part of the classroom teacher and the teacher-librarian?

4. When this profession grabbed information literacy or process learning as its domain, the trend was to leave content learning to the classroom teacher and process learning to the teacher-librarian. Has this trend been a healthy or isolating factor in the learning community of the school?

5. Is information literacy "owned" by the teacher-librarian as a part of the curriculum classroom teachers are unable to deliver, thus necessitating a professional teacher-librarian in the school whose

responsibility it is to teach these skills?

It is unclear whether given a room full of library educators and/or district library media educators a consensus on the answers to the above questions could be produced. To date, it appears the movement for information literacy has produced a wide variety of practice and it is certain the broader educational community and its literature either ignores this topic or recognizes the mixed signals it seems to receive from the library profession as a whole.

That said, there are a number of exemplary teacher-librarians who have carved out in the agendas of their schools a place for information literacy where both administrators and faculty recognize this contribution to process learning alongside content learning as a way to maximize academic achievement. Are you one of those practitioners? How did you get there? What demonstrated effects have you collected, reported, and disseminated? And, how could we as a profession clone the best and speak more loudly to the community of education, parents, and to the learners themselves?

It is apparent from our look at the research since 2002, interest is shifting toward the new world of information technology. Currently, there is enormous interest in the use of Web 2.0 tools to enhance both teaching and learning. How learners flourish in the digital world seems to be both the same, yet different than, the largely print world of the past. We seem to be investigating the challenge of turning kids' and teens' social networking skills into strong skills for academic achievement. It would seem the digital divide will be sending us into a parallel world, yet still working with learners who have not yet emerged into digital space.

In 2028 someone will be looking back over the previous 20 years to glory in our reinvention, or, will be analyzing the reinvention and emergence of similar ideas dressed in new clothing. The question for all of us is, as automobiles replace horse-drawn carriages, when are we going to sell the horse farm?

REFERENCES

Callison, D. & Preddy, L. (2006). *The blue book on information age inquiry, instruction, and literacy*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Eisenberg, M. & Berkowitz, B. (2003). *The definitive Big 6 workshop handbook*. Columbus, OH: Linworth Publishing.

Loertscher, D. V. & Woolls, B. (2002). *Information Literacy: A review of the research*. 2nd ed. Salt Lake City, UT: Hi Willow Research and Publishing.

Stripling, B. & Pitts, J. (1998). *Brainstorms and blueprints: Teaching library research as a thinking process*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design*. 2nd Ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Tell Us What You Would Like to Read!

E-mail

editor@teacherlibrarian.com

and tell us what topics

you would like to read about,

and we will seek

to publish articles on

those topics. Other comments and

suggestions are

welcomed, too.

**TEACHER
LIBRARIAN**
The Journal for School Library Professionals