An Information Literacy Progression

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Navigating the world of information has become more complex and more difficult for adults, adolescents, and children. Using information in a way that solves problems and provides answers is often a daily struggle. How do people know what information is correct, current, and worthwhile? This may seem to be an adult problem but the truth is even small children are coping with a deluge of information that they must struggle to use effectively in their search for answers.

An opportunity to progress through skills, dispositions, responsibilities, and self-assessment from kindergarten all the way to twelfth grade and beyond is provided in the Standards for the 21st-Century Learner published in 2007 by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). The process of learning information literacy has always been a progression for students as they mature and develop, and these standards focus on that progression and allow school librarians the opportunity to scaffold learning. All subjects can utilize this progression to integrate information literacy skills into content area skills.

This article will focus on the progression of learning in information literacy and link the components of the standards to different age groups.

Standards

Standards from professional organizations provide guidance to practitioners in the field. Standards, as found in the current AASL Standards for the 21st-Century Learner in Action (2009), provide practitioners with a global approach to information literacy by including multiple literacies (digital, visual, textual, and technological). Furthermore, they focus on the learner and the learning process (2009). The AASL document includes four major standards, with each standard having the four strands of skills, dispositions, responsibilities, and self-assessment strategies.

This framework encourages the scaffolding of instruction from kindergarten through 12th grade.

The four AASL standards are focused on the learner. The standards establish expectations for student learners that allow them to develop a foundation for lifelong learning. The four standards state that learners use skills, resources and tools to:

- Inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge.
- Draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge.
STRANDS

Watching children and young adults as they progress through learning how to solve information problems, use technology, and develop social responsibility illustrates the complexity of helping them chart a course through the information literacy landscape. AASL’s publication, *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner in Action*, provides examples of the progression through the Skills, Dispositions in Action, Responsibilities, and Self-Assessment Strategies (2009). Benchmarks are set at the 3rd grade, 6th grade, 8th grade, and high school levels. These benchmarks illustrate the level of understanding that would be appropriate as students develop.

SKILLS

Skills are the first strand within each AASL standard. Skills are defined as “key abilities needed for understanding, learning, thinking, and mastering subjects” (AASL 2007). Many of the skills focus on the inquiry-based process. Younger students would illustrate their knowledge of the inquiry-based process by seeking information in books or electronic resources to find the answer to factual questions or to fulfill assignments. Older students would utilize inquiry to research complex topics and to create and revise questions of importance to them. As students mature, the questions and problems that are addressed through research become more complex. Students begin to understand the value of different types of resources and different kinds of information. In discussing guided inquiry, Carol Kuhlthau states,

> Inquiry learning is more than an occasional, optional research project. Guided Inquiry is a way of learning that accomplishes the objectives of 21st century schools. It is the way to meet the many requirements of the curriculum through engaging, motivating, and challenging learning. Teachers and librarians work together to guide students thinking and learning through inquiry (2010).

Science, like many content area subjects, benefits from the use of inquiry-based learning in the content area. The weather units for 2nd, 5th, and high school students in this issue demonstrate a progression of skills (see pages 50-57). Through these units, students assume a more independent role in developing the questions that will be answered and evaluating the resources that they will utilize. The subject remains essentially the same, but the process and outcomes become increasingly complex.

DISPOSITIONS

Dispositions are defined as “ongoing beliefs and attitudes that guide thinking and intellectual behavior that can be measured through actions taken” (AASL 2007). Dispositions provide a mechanism for exploring students’ more innate at-
The school librarian has the opportunity to encourage behaviors that enable students to be effective and ethical users of information. The students’ ability to be adaptable, flexible, resilient, persistent, productive, and independent increases as they mature and grow.

Incorporating dispositions into daily lessons may be one of the most difficult parts of addressing the standards, but it is also one of the most important. Each student exhibits a different level of progression within the dispositions. The 2nd grade weather unit, “Everyday Weather” (see pages 50-53), addresses confidence, self-direction, and independent choices (i.e., Standard 1.2.2) by asking students to explore a variety of weather sources. Students must be persistent in their information search (i.e., Standard 1.2.6) to explore and record seasonal weather changes. Standard 2.2.4 addresses personal productivity, and the unit requires students to provide evidence of their learning through illustrated seasonal charts and KWL charts.

The 5th grade weather unit, “Weather or Not?” (see pages 53-55), focuses on an analysis of weather myths and requires students to pose questions and look for factual information beyond the myth (i.e., Standards 1.2.1 and 1.2.4). Having the ability to look for answers beyond what is readily known is hard to evaluate, but it is a disposition that serves students well as they deal with problems in their own lives.

The dispositions addressed in the high school unit, “Global Change: Real or Imagined?” (see pages 56-57), require more maturity although the topic still centers on weather. Students are asked to use divergent and convergent thinking to form and test conclusions (i.e., Standard 2.2.2). Debating climate change allows each student to develop a perspective based on evidence while working with others (i.e., Standards 2.2.3 and 3.21).

Responsibilities

The standards define responsibilities as “common behaviors used by independent learners in researching, investigating, and problem solving” (AASL 2007). In reading the individual standards under the “Responsibility” category, it becomes clear that students are being asked not only to respect the legal rights of others but also to be engaged in the world community while seeking answers and resolving problems. This strand carries a weighty ethical component that relates to social responsibility.

The weather units all address the concept of relating learning to the real world (i.e., Standard 2.3.1) by utilizing actual weather data to draw conclusions. The high school unit goes further to address diverse perspective and to encourage public debate (i.e., Standards 2.3.2, 3.3.1, and 3.3.3). Information literacy lessons that focus on real-world problems provide opportunities to address responsibilities and provide students authentic learning.

Self-assessment

Self-assessment is a skill that becomes progressively important for students as they mature. The ability for students to understand their own strengths and weaknesses and to self-correct is important in their academic, personal, and, eventually, professional lives. Each lesson can be an opportunity for self-assessment. The weather units utilize the self-assessment strategy of having students monitor their information-seeking processes (i.e., Standard 1.4.1) by providing guidance in the form of self-evaluation forms and checklists. As students mature, they are asked to reflect on the process and to make decisions on how to deal with information (i.e., Standard 2.4.1, 2.4.2). The ability to be increasingly self-critical is one that develops with maturity, but even the youngest students can make observations about what they want to learn and the value of the information they have gathered.

Conclusion

As the world of information becomes more complex, the need for information literacy becomes more important. The school librarian plays a crucial role in leading students through a progression of skills helping them become lifelong learners and effective users of information. Standards for the 21st-Century Learner provides the foundation for developing complex skills to navigate the world of information.

References:

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