In Your Mind

INTRODUCTION

The Independent Learning Standards 4, 5, and 6, as explained in Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning, are as follows:

- The student who is an independent learner is information literate and pursues information related to personal interests.
- The student who is an independent learner is information literate and appreciates literature and other creative expressions of information.
- The student who is an independent learner is information literate and strives for excellence in information seeking and knowledge generation. (AASL & AECT, 1998, pp. 23-29)

Knowledge seeking is not just a classroom experience. We seek information practically every day of our lives. What medicine should I take for a sinus headache? Where can I purchase the least expensive computer monitor? Should I buy a new car now; if so, what kind? Where should we go on vacation this summer? All of these require information literacy skills. As a student, these will vary, such as What college should I attend? What would my friend like for graduation? How can I send an online birthday card? What is the fastest route to the movie theatre? Information Power states, "The student constructs meaningful personal knowledge based on...information...[and] seeks information related to various dimensions of personal well-being, such as career interests, community involvement, health matters, and recreational pursuits" (p. 23).
INDEPENDENT LEARNING

Information literacy encompasses not only facts but leisure materials as well. According to *information Power*, "The student who is an independent learner applies the principles of information literacy to access, evaluate, enjoy value, and create artistic products" (ALA, 1998, p. 26). It takes knowledge to evaluate a work of fiction or a work of art-and to enjoy and value it. These skills can also be taught and learned *information Power* states, "[A] student [who is an independent learner] actively and independently reflects on and critiques personal thought processes and individually created information products" (p. 29). *Reflection* is a key word here. Students must learn to reflect so they can understand what is good and bad, revise, improve, and update. According to Rafoth (2001), in *Inspiring Independent Learning*, "Successful students know how to study, prepare for exams, identify important information in teacher talk and monitor their own learning" (p. 60). Fostering independent learning is a necessary skill for students-and can be taught by using a variety of activities and strategies. Again, this is yet one more job for the school library media specialist!

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Actually, a minimal amount of research is available regarding independent learning and information literacy. However, I believe that it is a critical characteristic of a student who will be committed to lifelong learning, make independent decisions by using informed opinions, and find pleasure in the creative arts. Pappas (2002) remarks, "So the question arises, how do we teach the appreciation of other media?...Appreciation involves developing an understanding of a medium and learning how artists and writers construct meaning within that medium... Young people today are living in a visual world and need to learn to convey ideas in a visual format" (p.25). Rankin (1996) says, "It is no accident that visual displays have become increasingly common in an information-rich world. They attract our attention more readily than blocks of text. They summarize and organize data" (p. 148). Pappas explains, "Appreciation is more than just understanding how a creative work is constructed. Appreciation also is related to our personal values system... Students may need many opportunities to develop their own value system related to different forms of creative expression. As educators, we need to give them those opportunities" (2002, p. 26).
Students need to appreciate a variety of types of information: by viewing, reading, listening, and so forth. Independent learning is a result of making informed opinions and finding pleasure in the arts. According to Rafoth (2001), "Teachers [and school library media specialists] can inspire independent learning through easy, often subtle, techniques that gently place responsibility for learning in the hands of students and teach them how to help themselves learn" (p. 15). When students succeed, their motivation "and confidence rises and they learn to enjoy taking control of their learning. Rafoth (2001) also makes this statement regarding independent learning: "Teachers [and school library media specialists] play an important role in enabling their students to develop independent learning strategies, often by imparting simple strategies that can easily be embedded into the classroom routine. They must be aware of what students can and should achieve at different metacognitive stages in their lives. The strategies that students learn in the upper grades are inherently more complex than what they can master in the early grades. However, these more complex strategies are based on the recitation and other simple strategies they have learned as younger students. Finally, teachers [and school library media specialists] must take particular care not to discourage the kinds of questions and activities that help students become independent learners" (p. 21). We must inspire independent learning in our students so they can continue the process of lifelong learning. The following sources are valuable in helping you acquire more (and varied) information about independent learning and information literacy:

Barron, D. D. (2001). Thanks for the connections: Now are we information literate? School Library Media Activities Monthly, 18(3), 49-51. This article discusses the role of libraries in promoting information access and information literacy it also includes useful Web sites that assist librarians in implementing "information Power" and the information literacy standards.

Callison, D. (2001). integrated instruction. School Library Media Activities Monthly, 17(5),33-39. This article includes a history of course-related integrated instruction, isolated instruction, individual instruction, collaborative planning with other teachers, and independent inquiry that can lead to lifelong learning.

Jones, C. (2001). Infusing information literacy and technology into your school library media program. Knowledge Quest, 30(1), 32-33. This article focuses on infusing technology and instructional strategies into a school library media program. It is aimed at K-S students and discusses a tool that fosters a pre-reader's independent access to resources and other useful tips.
Kresberg, S. (2001). Faculty-library media specialist cooperation or collaboration. School Library Media Activities Monthly, 18(1), 22-25. This article considers the differences in meaning between collaboration and cooperation and suggests methods to help library media specialists collaborate with faculty members.

Latrobe, K., & Masters, A. (2001). A case study of one district’s implementation of Information Power. School Library Media Research, 4. This case study documents the initial implementation of "information Power."

Lehman, K., & Dudley, J. (2001). Collaborating for information literacy. Knowledge Quest, 30(1), 24-25. This article describes a Web-based database project that houses lessons created by more than 30 elementary school library media specialists. It includes two sections: Literature Appreciation and Information Skills.

Line, M. B. (2000). The lifelong learner and the future library. New Review of Libraries and Lifelong Learning, 1, 56-80. This article identifies information literacy as a critical skill for independent learning. It outlines characteristics of the ideal library for lifelong learners for resources, access, and services.

Martin, J. (2001). Information literacy news flash. School Library Media Activities Monthly, 17(5), 22. This article focuses on the use of the television show The Barton Chapel Morning News Show to provide students a means for applying information literacy, independent learning, and social responsibility standards.

**NON-PRINT**


SCENARIOS

Let's look at practical!, down-to earth ways and methods that school library media specialists can use to assist students with independent, socially responsible learning. Information Power's Standard 4 explains that the student who is an independent learner applies the principles of information literacy to access, evaluate, and use information about issues and situations of personal interest (ALA, 1998). The following are three scenarios-one for a high school, one for a middle school, and one for an elementary school situation that relate to this standard.

High School: Joe, a junior high school student, comes into the school library media center after his last class and requests assistance from the school librarian, Mr. Saul.

Mr. Saul: Hi Joe, it is good to see you this afternoon. How can I help you?
Joe: Hi, Mr. Saul. I have been thinking about where I might want to go to college next year. I kind of know what I want to be, but I don't know the best schools for it. Where do I look?
Mr. Saul: First, what do you want to be?
Joe: I want to go into law... but something like international law.
Mr. Saul: Great! That sounds like an interesting and exciting career. Joe: Yes, I'd really like to go into that field. I heard that there are some books and Internet sites that tell about colleges and universities and what they offer.
Mr. Saul: You're right. Here is what I am going to do for you. I have three CD-ROMs that should help, called Peterson's College Database, Lovejoy's College Counselor, and The College Handbook. I will get you started with these CD-ROMs. You can explore them and take notes. If you want to investigate it more thoroughly, I have written down several Web sites that also contain information about colleges and universities (www.collegenet.com, www.allaboutcollege.com, and www.theadmissionsoffice.com). Do you feel comfortable using the CD-ROMs and Internet?
Joe: Sure, that's perfect, Mr. Saul! I will begin today, but I may need to come back a few more days to look more thoroughly.
Mr. Saul: That's fine. Good luck. If you run into any problems, I will be available.
Teachers, the LMC, and Skill Development

The library media center can enrich the learning experience for students and make them more confident, independent learners—but only if they have the skills to use it successfully. Most students do not automatically pick up the full range of information skills they need. However, these skills can be developed if teachers set out to:

- Decide on key skills to be developed when drawing up schemes of work and planning projects and assignments. The skills chosen will influence the resources required and the activities selected.
- Provide opportunities for students to practice these skills in an appropriate subject context.
- Devote discussion time to exploring how students apply the skills and particularly how they can build on their existing strategies. Teachers tend to be good at providing practice opportunities, but not so good at reflecting with students on the skills use.
- Build feedback on student skills development into assessment.

Research has shown that although students necessarily employ a range of information skills in doing any project, they can only focus on a few. Choices have to be made about which skills should be developed at any given time. Relatively short practice and reflection activities can be introduced into lessons or projects to develop students' information skills.

Sneaky Teaching: The Librarian's Role

Act as a role model of good information searching
- Reject the temptation to find it for them because it's quicker
- Give support and encouragement
- Give advice
- Help students to evaluate the relevance of the information they have found through questions about relevance to task
- Be aware of the marks scheme for units of work and point out that copying will not meet the criteria set
- Remind students to make a note of their sources

(For more information, go to http://www.etln.org.uk/page23.html)
Middle School: Sarah, a seventh-grade student, comes to the school library media center one morning before first period to talk to the school library media specialist, Mrs. Ben, about an upcoming vacation she and her family would like to take this summer.

Mrs. Ben: Good morning, Sarah, how are you this morning? Sarah: Fine, thank you. I want to ask you how to find something.

Mrs. Ben: Great. What is it you need to find?

Sarah: My family and I are going on a vacation this summer. We don't know where. All we know is somewhere in the United States. I have heard that there are some books and Web sites that can help me. I told my family I would do the research this year.

Mrs. Ben: That's terrific! Here is what we will do. I have some books to show you. Most of them are about specific places, but I will also write down quite a few Web sites that will give you a broader search. (The books: Fodor's New York City, Fodor's Road Guides USA: Great American Drives of the West, Frommer's USA, Dorling Kindersley's Guías Visuales: San Francisco, and Sehlinger's The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World). (The Web sites are www.mapsonus.com. www.mapquest.com. and http://maps.expedia.com/OverView.asp.) Do you feel comfortable with this?

Sarah: Oh, sure. This is exactly what I want! I just needed someone to get me started and point me in the right direction. I know lots about the Internet, so that will not be a problem.

Mrs. Ben: Wonderful. Take your time and remember that I am available if you run into any problems.

Elementary School: Tori, a third-grade student, visits the school library media center one afternoon and asks the school library media specialist, Mr. Ross, if he can help her find some information about horses. This is not for a report. Tori stated that she just wants to learn more about them because someday she would like to own and ride some of her own.

Mr. Ross: Hi Tori. How are you this afternoon?

Tori: Fine, Mr. Ross. Can you help me find something?

Mr. Ross: I will sure try. What are you looking for?

Tori: I want to find out some information about horses because when I grow up, I want to own and ride them. It doesn't have to be a lot right now. I just want some general information
Mr. Ross: Ok. That will be no problem. Here is what I will do. I will guide you to a few encyclopedias (print ones): Child craft, Grolier’s The New Book of Knowledge, and Oxford Children’s Encyclopedia. Tori, I also have an encyclopedia on CDROM and I will get you started on that: World Book Multimedia Encyclopedia. Oh, I also know of some books about horses in the library: Girls and Their Horses: True Stories from American Girl, DK Pockets: Horses, and Album of Horses. Do you think that will be enough for a beginning?

Tori: Oh, yes, Mr. Ross. This is wonderful. May I check out the three books?

Mr. Ross: Certainly. If you have any questions, I will be here until 4:30 P.M.

What occurred in these three scenarios? The school library media specialist assisted the students, but they also promoted independent learning. Any of these school library media specialists could have looked up the information and handed it to the student. However, that would not have helped the students learn to be independent learners, and it would not have helped you (in the long run), as these students are becoming independent learners and will not rely on your assistance (as much!) in the future.

Standard 5 in Information Power states the following: "The student who is an independent learner applies the principles of information literacy to access, evaluate, enjoy, value and create artistic products" (ALA, 1998, p. 26). Let's look at another scenario to demonstrate how a school library media specialist can accomplish this.

Barbie Styers, a second-grade teacher, would like to make her Native American unit more applicable to each student. In the past, they discussed Native Americans and the students wrote a short report about one aspect of Native Americans. Mrs. Styers approaches the school library media specialist, Amy Real, with this situation.

Amy Real: Hi Barbie. What can I do for you today?

Barbie Styers: Amy, I have been teaching the Native American's unit for seven years now. I am tired of doing it the same old way-and I can tell my students are, too. I certainly know the content, but could use some assistance with fresh techniques. Can you help me figure out something different and more fun to do with this unit of study? Of course, as you know, state

standards mandate specific learning by students, but I believe it can still be exciting and original.

**Amy Real:** Certainly. Let's work on this together. I will gather viable resources and you can assist me by providing state standards-keeping me on track -so to speak. As a team, we can make this a unique opportunity for your students!

**Barbie Styers:** Great. Let's work together Thursday afternoon, ok?

**Amy Real:** Sure!

**Amy Real:** (Thursday) Hi Barbie. I think I have so me great resources for your Native American unit.

**Barbie Styers:** Fantastic! I am anxious to hear them-and I am ready with the state standards.

**Amy Real:** It seems that this unit could use a wider variety of resources-I know in the past, students just used encyclopedias and a few books. I have located a video about Cherokee Indians, a CD-ROM regarding Native Americans that is very interactive and fun, and a large number of Web sites regarding all sorts of issues surrounding Native Americans. I was also able to borrow a great set of books about Native Americans from another school library media center. In addition, I was thinking that we could change how the students are assessed. Instead of reports, why not give them choices about how they express what they know? For example, some students might dress up and create a short play, so me may perhaps draw, paint, or sculpt, so me issue concerning Native Americans, some may even write a short story of their own (fiction or nonfiction) about them. I also know that you have a few students who know technology well. Perhaps they could create a PowerPoint presentation. These are merely a few examples -the list could go on and on. In the end, we will have a wide variety of formats, the students will enjoy learning, they will be able to express themselves in whatever creative manner they wish, and they will become more independent learners. What do you think?

**Barbie Styers:** This is terrific! It fits perfectly into the state standards and our curricular go I can think of three of my students already who would love to create a PowerPoint presentation-and one who would love to create a play-and, oh. I have one student who is an excellent artist. I am already excited! I know my students will have a good time producing a project of their own-it gives them freedom and a chance to be creative. I will begin the lesson plan today and share it with you Monday. Thank you so much, Amy.

**Amy Real:** You're welcome. Let me know what I can do to help... and don't forget to invite
In this scenario, students are learning a topic by viewing a variety of formats and are allowed to present their understanding of Native Americans creatively, capitalizing on each student's and format's particular strength. The students are working independently.

Another portion of Standard 5 involves reading for pleasure. As a school library media specialist, you should promote recreational reading. Even more important, you should promote recreational reading in the content areas and provide access to popular resources. Students are often reluctant to ask for help in locating a leisure reading book. As a school library media specialist, use a positive approach and generously offer your help to students. In addition, learn to use all the tools for promoting books and reading available to you. You should also create an environment in the school library media center that encourages students to read and helps them find the right book. Six examples of helpful resources for teachers and school library media specialists are the following:


A few rather effortless ways to promote recreational reading are the following:
Collect book lists. Photocopy them and put them in a binder as a display for student use.
Create a "If you liked..." list. For example, you might put, "If you liked the book *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, you might like to look at some books written by Madeline L'Engle." This will help students branch out in their choices of leisure reading.
Have students create a list of book reviews (peer or professional).
Post the list around the school library media center.
Put up posters about reading or certain books. Surround the poster with books that are similar. Display bestsellers or various genres. Make the display(s) appealing and exciting to young people.

I am sure that you can create other ways to promote creative expressions of information-use your imagination!

*Information Power's* Standard 6 states, "The student who is an independent learner applies the principles of information literacy to evaluate and use his or her own information processes and products as well as those developed by others. That student actively and independently reflects on and critiques personal thought processes and individually created information products" (ALA, 1998, p. 29). The following scenario may further explain this statement:

*Carol and Phil, both junior high school students, have been coming to the school library media center during their English class period for the past week. They are working on a report together about major natural disasters in the United States during the past 50 years. One day, they approach the school library media specialist, Ms. Cole, explaining that something is not right about their report.*

*Carol and Phil:* Ms. Cole, as you know, we have been working on a project all week, but we now both agree that something is wrong. Can you help us?

*Ms. Cole:* Sure, I will be happy to. Explain what you think is wrong. What is the problem?

*Carol and Phil:* Well, we are writing about major natural disasters in the United States over the past 50 years. It is very interesting and we have found lots and lots of information about these disasters. But now we are trying to write the report, and it just seems so dull. I mean these disasters were incredible—we saw a video about one earthquake and a laserdisc about a volcano and lots of cool pictures on the Internet about other natural disasters. It's really hard to
Ms. Cole: Did your English teacher say that you must turn in a written report?

Carol and Phil: Well, no, not really. I guess we just thought that is what we should do. What else could we do?

Ms. Cole: First, let's get permission from your teacher and we will talk about it tomorrow, ok?

Carol and Phil: That sounds great. See you tomorrow.

Ms. Cole: (next day) As you probably know, your teacher welcomes the idea of an alternative to a written report.

Carol and Phil: Yeah, we know—that's super. What suggestions do you have for us?

Ms. Cole: Well, you said that words are "not doing the job." What might depict major natural disasters in the United States more effectively?

Carol: Oh, I know, we need to show them visuals. How could we do that?

Phil: I've got an idea! You taught us how to create a PowerPoint last year-remember?-and I've learned how to add video, pictures, everything!

Carol: That's great, Phil. I can help you organize it—we learned all about graphic organizers earlier this year, right?

Ms. Cole: I think you've got the perfect idea! Major natural disasters gain more interest and have more meaning and authenticity when you have visuals accompanying the words. Don't forget to invite me to your presentation!

Carol: Thanks a million, Ms. Cole. Let's get started, Phil!

Carol and Phil reflected on their work and revised it based on feedback. They modified their presentation to make it more authentic, meaningful, and exciting. Carol and Phil thought of strategies to improve their work. They, too, are becoming independent learners.

Independent learning can begin at a very young age. School library media specialists (and teachers) provide guidance and students assume the responsibility for their own study and learning. Yes, this is yet another role change. You, as a school library media specialist, must assist students in learning for themselves.