

## **The Media Center:**

### **Information Power: Because Student Achievement is the Bottom Line**

**by**

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"The mission of the library media program is to ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information." (Information Power Building Partnerships for Student Learning, AASL/AECT 1998 Page 6.)

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My mother was a school librarian; I grew up hearing about accession books and shelf list files; I watched her sort card catalog cards on the dining room table. She claimed the only consistency in her job was the inconsistency. Today's media specialists are likely to be telling their children about student projects, online catalogs, or curriculum meetings. Yet, as school libraries have evolved into media centers and school-wide media programs, there has been the consistency of providing information and helping students learn.

What has changed, though, is how to achieve that goal. When my mom needed advice she likely consulted School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow, a document influential in building today's media programs. I began my career when Standards for School Media Programs were published. "My" 1969 manual introduced the terms media and media specialist, a response to changes in education and our broader roles. Emphasis was on providing service and working with students. Like my mom, I hoped for a visit by the state supervisor, an influential leader known for her unending advocacy of strong library programs. My role was evolving; Media Programs: District and School: 1975, described a systems approach, introducing the concepts of networks and technology. I've been most influenced by Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs, a 1988 document articulating our roles as teacher, instructional consultant, and information specialist. Together, the documents represent a shift in our roles and programs, but they were largely prescriptive, often consulted for their numerical recommendations about budgets, collections, staffing and space.

Information Power: Partnerships for Student Learning, published in 1998 departs from a prescriptive approach. Media programs are no longer measured by the number of books in the media center or, but by the information literacy level of the students. Student learning is achieved through the collaborative and proactive leadership roles of the school media specialist, not merely by cataloging and organizing materials.

The most tangible portion of Information Power is the cogent description given of the information literate student presented as a series of nine articulate standards, each with its own indicators and proficiency levels. Standards address three broad areas: Information literacy, Independent Learning, and Social Responsibility. At first glance the standards may seem like nothing new; for years leaders in our profession have been urging us to go beyond teaching only information access skills. But, the concise, articulate presentation of the standards makes them extremely useful, realistic and achievable. These new standards emphasize higher level thinking and a progression of achievement. Technology is not specifically mentioned in the standards; information, processes and thinking are emphasized throughout.

The standards are strategically aligned with content area standards such as those from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics; they are not simply examples. They present solid links between information literacy and all content areas from physical education to English. They provide concrete examples for teachers unaccustomed to thinking about information literacy. Media specialists should use them as a tool to show teachers and administrators how information literacy can readily be woven into all curriculum areas. The standards prove useful in both formal and informal curriculum planning sessions; teachers in my school have already written some of them into local curriculum and commented, "this makes so much sense." I've found the document invaluable as part of a district team writing rubrics and assessments and useful during informal conversations about student use of resources.

Media specialists are encouraged to "integrate the information literacy standards for student learning into all formal documents related to the library media program." (Page 103) An Information Power appendix about assessments is a companion piece to the standards. Rubric examples and suggestions for alternative assessments are nice tools for acquiring a basic understanding of assessment.

It is significant that these nine standards stand alone as Part One of Information Power and are sold as a separate document. The AECT/AASL vision committee and the leaders of the media profession who participated in a Delphi study to define the information literate student have unquestionably developed a solid, usable document which deserves to be widely read and widely shared in the learning community.

"Building Partnerships for Learning," Part II combines the familiar information access, teaching, and program administration roles with the more visionary roles of collaboration, leadership and technology. Gone is the reference to our role as instructional consultant, instead there is a practical and theoretical emphasis on collaboration, the media specialist as part of the teaching and learning team. The teaching and learning roles involve curriculum involvement, participation on technology committees, and collaboration beyond the school.

Those expecting state and national mandates to support or even save their programs may be disappointed. Since Information Power departs from a prescriptive approach, the capacity to build a program is clearly placed in the hands of the media specialist and his or her abilities to develop and advocate for a program that meets student needs. Information Power challenges us to develop a program based on a series of principles and goals which can be seen as a media specialists' corollary to the nine student information literacy standards. Principles and goals can serve as a self-assessment, a tool for determining priorities, or as a job description. Teaching and learning, information access, and program administration all revolve around student learning because "student achievement is the bottom line."

"Collaboration, leadership and technology underlie the vision" (Page 47 ) for media programs. Collaboration--working with teachers, students and the entire learning community is the key to program strength. Leadership opportunities are present for those who choose to take on leadership roles in decision-making, technology and educational reform. Providing staff development for teachers, offering opportunities for them to become life-long learners and helping them improve how they teach and learn are some of many ways for media specialists to become leaders, mentors and role models.

Technology is more than hardware, software and wires. Again Information Power departs from prescribing

numbers. Media specialists are urged to be "primary leader[s] in the school's use of all kinds of technologies--both instructional and informational--to enhance learning." However, this does not mean being a technician, but rather a technologist working with teachers and students to achieve authentic learning and information literacy by using information technology as an instructional tool. (Page 54)

Program is more important than place. Gone are recommendations and descriptions of square footage and spaces. Today and tomorrow's media programs are dependent on school-wide access information access; student learning truly can take place anywhere, anytime as student learning has moved beyond the classroom and media center to the learning community. A concept new to this edition of Information Power, the Learning Community is a dynamic and vital spectrum of teachers, students, parents, and others in the local community and beyond. Access to the collection of regional, state, national and even global resources is strengthened by technology and the collaborative role of the media specialist. Media specialists are urged to become proactive, by building relationships, resource sharing, cooperative programming, and practicing advocacy.

Advocacy is critical to implementing the Information Literacy standards and informing others of the vision for the 21st century media program. Advocacy opportunities abound through work with local universities, regional educational agencies, and professional organizations. Reaching out to professional organizations outside of the library/media/technology field will have far-reaching impact whether discussing information literacy or the changing role of the media specialist. Audience participants will typically be surprised by what they learn. Those whose geographic location may make it difficult to participate in professional collaboration or advocacy can take advantage of the unlimited opportunities of telementoring and distance learning which offers opportunities to both teach and learn. One group of media specialists, primarily from the Midwest, participated in a web based university class discussion on implementing Information Literacy, certainly an example of collaboration, sharing and learning anywhere, anytime.

So what does Information Power mean to our profession? For some, the vision is unimaginable. The document may inspire others to modify their approach towards their profession or the goals they strive towards. And, for some it is an affirmation of what they are already doing. For all it is an inspiration to become more involved in student learning. What you do with Information Power will depend on how you view it. If you haven't already purchased Information Power it's time to immediately place an order. And while you're at it, buy several extra copies of the standards for your principal, curriculum directors and other administrators.

My mom, always the teacher, would be pleased.

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