

# ED446769 2000-11-00 The Role of the School Library Media Specialist in the 21st Century. ERIC Digest.

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## The Role of the School Library Media Specialist in the 21st Century. ERIC Digest.

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## ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC INFORMATION POWER: LESSONS AND LEGACY

In 1988, the American Library Association published its monograph about school library media standards, *Information Power*. This publication, along with its follow-up published in 1998, provide an extremely helpful road map to guide educators into the next century. *Information Power* underscores the importance of the role of the library media specialist in producing well-rounded, information literate students.

*Information Power* does more than offer an inspiring vision of the future of library media specialists in the school. The authors provide standards for information literacy learning, as well as indicators for each standard. These standards create goals for all educators.

## TECHNOLOGY AND OPPORTUNITY

What kinds of technology tools will be available to schools in the near future? Some trends appear clear—we will have more connectivity and technology that is customized to individual needs. Technology will be integrated seamlessly. Processing tools, communication tools, and information tools will be connected with common access mechanisms and interfaces. Clearly, future technology will present a special challenge and opportunity for education.

Library media specialists are part of the solution. As noted, librarians are the original information specialists. We call this "the information perspective," and it means that library media specialists look at curriculum, assignments, and learning in terms of the information resources, processes, and technologies required for student success.

Library media professionals have tried to teach students to consider the information resources they need and then to use the appropriate access technology to find resources and information.

Library media specialists have been pioneers in teaching information skills and integrating technology skills into the information problem-solving process. One of the most popular approaches to integrated information and technology skills is the Big6 approach, developed by Mike Eisenberg and Bob Berkowitz (1988). The Big6 approach is a six stage, non-linear model for information problem-solving. The Big6 and other models of the information process (such as those by Kuhlthau, 1993; Stripling and Pitts, 1988; and Pappas and Tepe, 1995) define the path that students take to solve information problems. When the focus is on the problem-solving aspects of learning, technology assumes its rightful place as a tool.

## CHALLENGES FOR LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS

Gary Hartzell, professor of education at the University of Nebraska, refers to library

media specialists as "invisible" professionals (1997). He argues that in many school districts, library media specialists should be participants in the decisions affecting technology, curriculum, and resources at the school and district level. He also points to the widespread trend of cutting library budgets and, in some cases, library media positions to ease school financial problems.

Hartzell points out that there are very few courses in any major school of education in this country that focus on the use of library and information in learning and teaching. Few teacher training programs mention the roles of the library media program and the library and information professional at all. Some library media specialists are reluctant to promote themselves to fellow educators and the school administration because they do not clearly communicate the nature and role of library and information work.

Library media specialists need to do a better job of clearly articulating their roles in preparing students for the information- and technology-rich workplace of the future. It is essential for library media specialists to commit themselves to the central principles that define their roles as information specialists and educators-helping students to achieve optimum use of information literacy.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- \* Principle One: School libraries have no boundaries. The "library" is not a place; rather, library is everywhere. This means that school library media specialists should not be cloistered within the walls of the library and within the constraints of scheduled library time. Beyond the school environment, students will need to make library skills part of their daily lives. Information problem-solving skills help students on a daily basis.

- \* Principle Two: Library and information professionals should be flexible. In the opening chapter of *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*, the authors describe a vision of the library media specialist in the information-rich society of the future. In their view, library media specialists of the future will need to wear many professional hats. These roles include four basic categories: teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator (1998).

- \* Principle Three: Ensure that students are effective users of ideas and information. This principle describes the central vision of *Information Power*. This is also one of the central tenants of the library profession. Additionally, it highlights the most important and enduring role that the library media specialist plays within the school-that of the provider of information services and skills instruction. All members of the school community need to understand that the library media specialist is uniquely qualified, valuable, and able to provide essential information literacy instruction and valuable information services.

- \* Principle Four: Information is everywhere, essential, and central. Principle Four and Principle One are closely related. Information resources exist inside and outside the library. Students need to master the information literacy skills they will use in everyday life. The idea that information is everywhere is a basic premise of information literacy

(Spitzer, Eisenberg & Lowe, 1998).

## CHANGE AND THE LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALIST

The changing role of technology in education will increase opportunities for information literacy educators. As technology becomes more prevalent in learning and teaching, there is even a greater need for information, library, and technology work in schools. The word "disintermediation" is discussed in reference to future technologies.

Disintermediation is the idea that as technology becomes more advanced, users will no longer require assistance to use it (Gillian, 1996). The development of the World Wide Web has revealed a very different story. We have seen a dramatic increase in the use of question-and-answer services (such as AskERIC, [www.askeric.org](http://www.askeric.org)) in the past five years. As the Web becomes more complex, users need more help to find what they want. Information and technology specialists are well equipped to help users find information.

## THE INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY TEAM

Of course, the roles and responsibilities of the school faculty will also change in the future. Information and technology teams composed of technology teachers, library and information professionals, English teachers, history teachers, and key administrators can help with successful integration of technology. These team members represent the political muscle, technical savvy, and information literacy expertise to ensure that all students get the information literacy instruction they need.

The work of the information and technology team goes beyond creating technology-rich learning environments for students, although this is one of their most important tasks. Effective teams have a close relationship with classroom teachers and administration, and their responsibilities affect every aspect of the school. Teams provide a technical support system, coordinate tech services and resources, and facilitate purchasing decisions. The team oversees the information and technology literacy program and ensures it is implemented as part of the classroom curriculum. An active, dynamic information and technology team is an integral part of the school, and they provide essential support to many administrators, teachers, and students.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Educators must assume a leadership role to ensure students learn. But how can we make this vision a reality? Here are a few steps for library media specialists to consider in creating a promising future:



\* Learn and absorb: Read and learn about information literacy and share that knowledge with other colleagues.



\* Get involved: Become actively involved in the information and technology program. Other teachers, administrators, and parents need to become aware of the importance of library media efforts to help students learn essential skills.



\* Be a leader: Assume an active role in decision-making and planning. Become involved with your school's technology committee, and come to meetings with your own vision of what the school's technology policy should contain.

These efforts are not optional. As educators, it is our responsibility to equip our students with the skills and understanding they will need. Clearly, this task will require high-quality library and information technology programs to meet students' needs in schools or in electronic, networked, or virtual learning environments.

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