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REFLECTING ON THE STANDARDS [ARTICLE]

HOW AASL LEARNING STANDARDS INFORM ACRL INFORMATION LITERACY STANDARDS

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ABSTRACT

ACRL and other academic librarians are currently re-examining the tough questions of learning, literacy, and education -- and the librarians' role in addressing these issues. They can use AASL's learning standards as one springboard for thought, particularly in terms of articulating learning. The result is a developmentally appropriate set of standards that reflects lifelong engagement with, and creation of, recorded information.

Developing and implementing literacies/ learning standards require deep analysis about the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that one needs in order to be what was traditionally called the "educated" person. What does it mean to be educated? What does it mean to be literate? The definitions for both terms have changed greatly over time. Being educated could mean having the equivalent of a high school diploma and a European tour, to "An educated person is one who has undergone a process of learning that results in enhanced mental capability to function effectively in familiar and novel situations in personal and intellectual life" (Mohanan, 2005). Over the years, being literate has meant being able to decipher a known text (e.g., the Bible) to being able to write original text. Now literacy implies that one can create knowledge communicated through emerging technologies. Since libraries deal with recorded information, they can legitimately ask what knowledge, skills and dispositions are needed to consume and produce recorded information that contributes to society? And furthermore, to what level, how well, should students be able to do this?

For today's students to survive and thrive in society, they need to make informed decisions and act effectively and responsibly. The preconditions for those processes include the ability to determine what information is needed, how to find and evaluate it, and how to comprehend and interpret it. Because today's society raises new issues, memorizing old answers to daily problems does not suffice, and even old responses to reccuring issues may result in negative consequences. In short, individuals need to keep learning – and know how to learn. In the process, individuals are creating new knowledge.

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) 2007 Standards for the 21st Century Learner were predicated on the ideas articulated in the paragraph above. The term "information literacy" occurs in just one paragraph, noting only that it has become more complex: "Multiple literacies, including digital, visual, textual, and technological, have now joined information literacy as crucial skills for this century" (p. 3). Interestingly, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (2011) has adopted the wording of "media and information literacy" to capture the idea of content and format. Even the term "information" can be tricky to define, let alone "data." Is a sunset data or information? The American Association of School Librarians (2007) cleverly sidestepped the problematic term "information literacy" when it used learners as its linchpin; they stated that "learners use skills, resources, and tools to:

1. Inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge.
2. Draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge.
3. Share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society.
4. Pursue personal and aesthetic growth. (p. 3)

Each standard is then parsed into specific indicators that demonstrate learner skills, dispositions in action, responsibilties, and self-assessment strategies.

It should be noted that academic librarians also run into the stumbling block of the term "information literacy," particularly since it wasn't in general parlance at the time of

many professors' own academic preparation. Academians seem to be more comfortable with the terms "critical thinking" (which usually refers to the ability to comprehend and analyze a given document, but which excludes the ability to locate relevant and worthy documents) and "research skills" (which does not address the ability to respond to unintended information problems).

The emphasis in the AASL standards is clearly on cognitive processes, although the affective domain is addressed in terms of some of the dispositions, such as curiosity, openness, and aeshetic appreciation. Factual, or declarative, knowledge is subsumed in the processes. For instance, in order to respect intellectual property rights, a learner must be able to describe and understand those rights. AASL describes the learning destination and, to some degree, the benchmarks along the way to reach the destination, but does not stipulate the specific path or the vehicle to use. Those steps need to be determined by the instructor or learning guide.

This line of thinking maps easily onto the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) which increasingly drive K-12 instruction. Most school librarians leverage CCSS to promote their collections and cross-curricular transfer of learning. A case could be made that this overarching process approach would also map onto higher education learning outcomes with little change. The underlying principle is that education focuses on student learning, and that library programs, along with professional librarians, can play a significant role in optimizing the conditions for learning.

The AASL standards also cleverly begins the discussion by asserting common beliefs (described as core values) which serve as preconditions for the learning standards: reading, inquiry-based learning, explicitly taught ethical behavior, technology skills, equitable access, expanding information demands, social context of learning, and the importance of school libraries. In recent years AASL has emphasized inquiry-based learning, which does not always align well with notions of high-stakes testing, although it has great potential since it typically involves students reading novel (as in new to them) informational text. The last belief underscores the contribution of school libraries: convenient equitable access to rich resources, and collaborative instruction and practice in using these resources.

These beliefs or pre-suppositions could well be mapped into higher education's conceptual frameworks. The beliefs also make sense in the academic community as they stand, with the proviso of the academic librarian assuming the role of resource-rich collaborator. Fortunately, university library systems tend to assign subject liaisons to provide a dependable source of information and information literacy processes. The high stakes testing environment does not exist to the same extent in higher education, except for some national praxis tests. However, even then, few faculty need to coach students in test-taking. Furthermore, programmatic comprehensive examinations are usually locally designed, and should reflect pre-identified student learning outcomes.

In the larger context, today's world is sometimes labeled the 'information society' or the 'knowledge society' because of the vast amount of available information as well as the need to sort and manage it effectively. Business has increasingly realized the value of intellectual capital; information has an economic value and requires competent

professionals capable of managing information. As early as the 1991 SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) Report, governmental agencies noted the need for employees who can locate, interpret and organize information, communicate information, create documents, solve problems, work with a variety of technology, and know how to acquire new knowledge. The intersection of technology and globalization in recent years has led to more intense and pluralistic interactions across societies. Because information's meaning and impact are contextualized, shared knowledge and understanding can be harder to achieve. International stakeholders at the World Summit on the Information Society stated their shared values of information literacy:

> Information literacy lies at the core of lifelong learning. It empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion of all nations (Garner, 2005, p. 3).

In the final analysis, learning should truly be lifelong, and it makes sense that P-20 formal education should try to articulate (i.e., compare across levels) curriculum either to identify equivalencies or to build upon prior learning. That articulation process tries to avoid too much overlap and to promote seamless transfer from one level to another. To a degree, the concept of college-readiness assumes that kind of articulation in that high school graduates should possess the skills and knowledge to be able to learn and apply post-secondary curriculum. Post-secondary librarians too often assert that students do not come into the library with these skills. Oakleaf and Owen (2010) examined the AASL learning standards and noted how the standards applied to sources that students use in college: websites, articles, books, reference materials, and data. The researchers also noted that many entering college students did not have those skills.

To close that literacy gap, school and academic librarians are called upon to work together. Librarians are the logical articulators since they work with all students and all curricular areas and witness the developmental aspects of learning. They can act as institutional representatives and catalysts who are aware of student and faculty needs, practices, and parameters. To that end, both types of librarians should work with their respective communities to advance the conversation about learning expectations and the roles that they can play. These conversations can inform standards development and deployment.

Frankly, this author preferred the ACRL information literacy standards to the old and new AASL versions. Nevertheless, the older AASL standards were easy to articulate. That said, the new AASL standards can help ACRL librarians rethink their stance on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that post-secondary students should develop and achieve by the time they graduate. Building on the typical academic model, some competencies should be expected of all students, as it is with general education requirements. Students with a major should be able to apply those competencies at a deeper level within their area of specialty. For instance, mathematics majors should be able to think and solve intellectual problems as mathematicians; they should be able to identify, access, and use the canon of mathematics information sources.

Just as school and academic librarians should articulate information literacy instruction so that incoming collegiates will be college ready, so too should academic librarians consider articulating with workplace librarians such as special libraries to ensure that college graduates are career-ready. Because many high school students go directly into the workplace, school librarians should articulate information literacy efforts with workplace librarians as well as academic librarians. It should be noted that school librarians might also consider such connections as well since many high school graduates go directly into the work environment, and do not pursue formal education thereafter.

Assuming that entering college students gained literacy based on the AASL learning standards, what information literacy competencies should post-secondary librarians expect those students to demonstrate? Many such librarians would probably respond with a sigh, and say, "none." Nevertheless, academic librarians could set baseline expectations, and then identify next-step literacies/learning standards. Considering that English and mathematics disciplines routinely require incoming students to take placement tests, and then be assigned to the developmentally appropriate course, some remedial in nature, could that approach be applied to information/learning competencies? Might all students be required to take the ETS iSkills test, and then be placed in information/learning competency courses, or have such explicit instruction be embedded in an appropriate general education course co-taught by a disciple faculty member and an academic librarian?

The reason for this entrance consideration is one of accountability. Natural consequences will result, such as academic or workplace failure. A more responsible response would be that librarians and other teaching faculty would provide the opportunities for students to meet reasonable learning standards through instruction and practice and provide timely interventions, so that graduating students are indeed prepared to survive and thrive in today's society – and improve it.

It should be noted, however, that these standards, be they at the K-12 or post-secondary level, do need to have the pre-conditions set in place, including high-quality library programs and professional librarians. To that end, academic librarians should lobby loudly for school librarians to be present and active at every educational level, insuring that K-12 students have the opportunities needed to meet AASL standards. The American Association of School Librarians even provides supporting documents that show how standards can be met at each grade level. While such increments are not feasible in post-secondary situations, a case may be made that post-secondary students can have benchmark assessments at the general education and degree level (including associate degree). Even though librarians are seldom the top decision-makers, they can yield powerful influence when both school and academic librarians support articulation between educational levels.

Standards serve as concrete measures of competencies. Librarians use their informed perspective, taking into account the environments in which they work, to state what students need in order to be prepared for the next rung in life relative to recorded information. Since recorded information is used in all curricula, it makes sense that librarians should collaborate with the rest of their educational community to optimize the likelihood that students can meet those standards. To that end, ACRL and other

academic library organizations are wisely and pro-actively re-examining the tough questions of learning, literacy, and education, and librarians' roles in addressing these issues. Librarians can use AASL's learning standards as one springboard for thought, particularly in terms of articulating learning. The result is a developmentally appropriate set of standards that reflects lifelong engagement with and creation of recorded information. The implementation of those standards is another question, needing to identify the resources and services required to provide the conditions for students to meet the standards. And so lifelong education continues…

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