Media Literacy

& THE AASL STANDARDS

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In preparation for this article, I Googled "define: media literacy" and got a ton of results. What I found troubling is that no library, librarian, or library-related organization was listed on the first page of the search results. We must do better. Not only must we continue to teach media literacy, we must also be on the forefront of defining what media literacy is and why it is important for our students and our communities. If school librarians are unwilling or unable to take on leadership in media literacy instruction, who will?

Okay, so for the definition, the Media Literacy Project (the first search result, and an organization that closed on June 30, 2015) defines media literacy as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media. Media literate youth and adults are better able to understand the complex messages we receive from television, radio, Internet, newspapers, magazines, books, billboards, video games, music, and all other forms of media" (Media Literacy Project n.d.).

Any of the actions in the definition above can be undertaken by students outside of the library and without the guidance of school librarians. Students have been accessing and creating media for years, often without our instruction or assistance. We add value to our students' media literacy journey with our instruction and guidance in the areas of access, analysis, evaluation, and creation of media. We challenge our learners to go beyond Google in their search for information or to use Google more effectively by applying advanced search concepts, such as Boolean operators and filters, to their searches, or by limiting their image searches to those images that are labeled for noncommercial reuse. We ask our students to analyze the sources of information they use to ensure the source is appropriate for their needs. Most commonly, we guide our students toward academic databases and resources specifically curated for their use such as our print collection, specific websites, or other media. We push our students to evaluate the quality of the resources they find online, using frameworks such as CRAAP (CSU 2010) and others. More on those in a bit. Finally, we encourage our students to learn and use a wide variety of tools in creating and sharing their knowledge with a broader audience than just their teachers and classmates.

The competencies involved in information and media literacy are interwoven throughout the frameworks in AASL's *National School Library Standards*. After carefully reading and rereading the AASL Standards, I am encouraged to see that the vast majority of these standards describe media-literacy-related activities that are already happening in many of the excellent school libraries across the United States. Below, I will share areas in which I found aspects of media literacy addressed in the AASL Standards.

Include Shared Foundation

In the Include Shared Foundation's Think Domain, we ask our learners to contribute to a balanced perspective when participating in a learning community by adopting a discerning stance toward points of view and opinions expressed in information resources and learning products. As school librarians, we help learners develop these competencies by providing a balanced collection of resources that reflect the diversity present in our student body and community at large. We empower our learners to become aware of and appreciate valuable con-

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tributions from many cultures and viewpoints. We also challenge our learners to share their own insights and perspectives by our creating a safe, accepting space for everyone. We create such a space by providing access to and guidance in using our school library collection, which will provide information from different points of view and a variety of cultures. We also create opportunities for our learners to share their own insights and perspectives, both in writing and in opportunities for participating in civil discourse through activities such as debates, which can be held in the school library during the school day or after hours.

In the Create Domain we ask our learners to interact with others who reflect a range of perspectives, evaluate a variety of perspectives, and represent diverse perspectives during learning activities. The school library is the perfect place for these activities, precisely because it is a space for everyone—every grade level, every learning style, and every ability level. As school librarians we break down the walls of our classrooms and schools, connecting our students to learners around the world, helping our learners see themselves as not only a part of their local communities, but also as part of the world.

Within the Share Domain we ask our learners to engage in informed conversation and active debate and to contribute to discussions in which participants are encouraged to express multiple viewpoints on a topic. This engagement with others who may have different viewpoints fosters empathy and the ability to create media messages that appeal to a wide variety of people, not only to those within a specific echo chamber. The school library is a space for people with different viewpoints and opinions to come together and—with the professional guidance of the

school librarian and possibly other educators in the building—respectfully share their perspectives.

Curate Shared Foundation

In the Curate Shared Foundation's Think Domain, we ask our learners to act on an information need by making critical choices about which information sources to use in their work. These critical-thinking skills set the stage for future success, as learners become adept at filtering out partisan noise and discovering useful information on which to base their choices. As school librarians, we help our learners develop these competencies by teaching them to dig deeper, going beyond the quick and easy answer, to access the best information available, not just the easiest information to locate. From my perspective, this is the heart of a school librarian's work, guiding students beyond a simple search on a commercial search engine to critically examine information sources to determine where the best sources are located.

Within the Create Domain, we ask our learners to gather information appropriate to their task by collecting information representing diverse perspectives, while systematically questioning and assessing the validity and accuracy of information. As learners create new meaning from these diverse sources, they organize a variety of information sources that best meet their needs, while carefully considering the accuracy, reliability, and validity of each source. As school librarians, we model this behavior for our learning community through our curation efforts and through direct instruction in information and technology skills required to effectively curate the highest-quality resources. One way to provide this instruction is

by leading a class in playing and discussing a media literacy game such as the one at <https://play.kahoot.it/#/k/5876044c-0392-4ab1-bf95-598686d53701>.

Within the Share Domain, we ask our learners to exchange information resources within and beyond their learning community by ethically using and reproducing others' work to contribute to collaboratively constructed information resources. As school librarians, we work with learners to develop respect and appreciation for different perspectives, to access curated resources, such as databases that have been specifically created for their use, and to responsibly create learning products using a variety of formats. We facilitate learners' development of these competencies by modeling the appropriate exchange of resources through our collection development policies and practices and by sharing carefully curated resources such as academic databases and subscription sites that have been selected and organized for specific purposes. AASL's annual lists of best apps and websites for teaching and learning give us great places to start when teaching students to access curated resources and responsibly create learning products using the best tools available. (To see the 2018 and previous years' lists, go to <https://standards.aasl.org/project/ba18> and <https://standards.aasl.org/project/bw18>.)
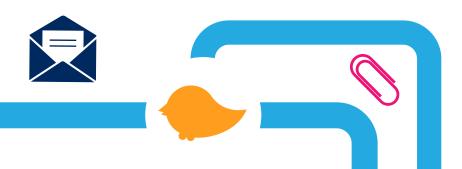
Engage Shared Foundation

For me, the most relevant Shared Foundation for media literacy instruction is Engage. Within the Think Domain, we ask our learners to follow ethical and legal guidelines for gathering and using information by responsibly applying information, technology, and media to learning; understanding the ethical use of information, technology, and media; and evaluating information for accuracy, validity, social and cultural context, and its appropriateness for their needs. We help learners accomplish all this by following professional standards in our practice; teaching learners how and why we evaluate information for accuracy, validity, social and cultural context; and assessing the information's appropriateness for a given need. We also educate our entire school community on information ethics and intellectual property. One example of teaching adults about the ethical use of information is our annual reminder of copyright law, the four factors of fair use, and how they apply to our copying and remixing educational materials for our students.

Within the Create Domain, we ask our learners to ethically use and reproduce others' work, acknowledge authorship, and demonstrate

respect for the intellectual property of others. We also want learners to include elements in their own personal knowledge products that enable others to credit content appropriately. An example of such an element is Creative Commons licensing. We foster learners' development of these competencies by sharing a variety of strategies to ethically use and reproduce others' work and by modeling this ethical use in our instruction. We also work with teachers to require complete attribution to acknowledge authorship and demonstrate respect for the intellectual property of others when working on class assignments. Our school libraries are environments in which all members of the school community can work together to engage in activities that feature the acceptable and ethical use of information, technology, and media.

Within the Share Domain, we ask learners to share information resources in accordance with modification, reuse, and remix policies. We help students develop these competencies by teaching our students strategies for sharing information in accordance with these policies, and by providing online and physical spaces for the dissemination of ideas and information. Any lessons we teach about citing sources using standard formats such as MLA or APA, as well as lessons in Creative Commons licensing, fall into this category.

As we and our learners develop competencies in the Grow Domain, we model the safe, responsible, ethical, and legal use of information and ask our learners to reflect on the process of ethically generating knowledge and to inspire others to engage in appropriate information behaviors. In addition to modeling and directly teaching ethical use of information and media, as school librarians we can be the champion for safe,

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responsible, ethical, and legal information behaviors in and beyond our school community. Americans have great trust and respect in libraries of all types. Part of the reason for this is our professional commitment to the ethics of librarianship, as well as to safe, responsible, and legal use of information. When we ask learners—including, in some cases, other educators—to reflect on their use of information and whether or not that use was ethical, safe, responsible, and legal, we are continuing this great tradition of commitment to professional librarians' responsibilities and respect for intellectual property.

Building On and Expanding Traditional Library Lessons

So, our new *National School Library Standards* create a framework to support our continuing efforts to teach media literacy and information literacy, both to our students and to the adults in our school as needed. The good news is we have been doing this for a very long time, and I would argue that we have been doing this very effectively, both in our independent library instruction, which typically happens at

the elementary level, and in our collaborative library instruction, which most commonly occurs in the secondary level in collaboration with classroom teachers. There are many examples of existing "library lessons" that address portions of the standards. One example briefly mentioned above are the lessons that school librarians have been giving for decades on citing sources—but updated, of course, for the 21st-century array of resources available to our learners. Another example is when we ask learners to evaluate a variety of perspectives, but we first teach them what a critical evaluation looks like. Many librarians use information evaluation rubrics and frameworks such as RADCAB (Christensson 2006), CRAAP (CSU 2010), RADAR (Mandalios 2013), or others useful for evaluating information sources.

There has been some pushback recently from some who believe that teaching information literacy using one of the frameworks above (incorrectly characterized as a checklist) sets up our students for failure by simplifying the questions that students should ask when evaluating

information sources (Breakstone et al. 2018). While these are indeed simple frameworks, I believe they are still an excellent way to introduce students to the idea of teasing apart a media message and looking at its component parts to determine its usefulness for their information needs.

Other skills, such as lateral reading, are extremely useful in applying these frameworks. For example, when assessing an author's reliability under the CRAAP framework, lateral reading comes into play when we teach our students to open a new tab in the browser and Google the author's name along with other keywords such as "criticism" or "reputation." In this way, we combine the fundamental skill of lateral reading with elements of our well-established information literacy frameworks to produce students who not only critically analyze information, but also potentially become fact-checkers for themselves and others in their communities.
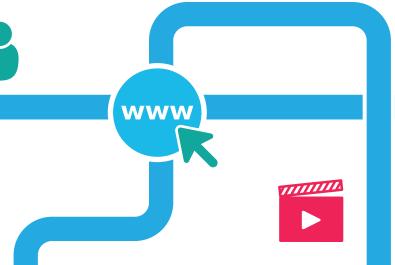
Looking Around and Looking Ahead

If you don't currently teach these aspects of media literacy in your school library or in collaboration with teachers in their classrooms, I strongly recommend getting started right away. First, familiarize yourself with our *National School Library Standards*. They create a strong foundation for media literacy instruction, as described above. I would then recommend familiarizing yourself with some of the issues in media literacy. A great place to start is Jay Smooth's Crash Course Media Literacy series on YouTube (preview at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPwJ0obJya0&list=PL8dPuuaLjXtM6jSpzb5gMNsx9kdmqBfmY>). These videos are well made and cover many aspects of media literacy in a style that our students will find engaging and thought provoking.

I call for school librarians around the country to not only continue teaching information and media literacy to our students and school communities, but also to publicize this instruction on our school library websites, social media platforms, professional journals outside the library community, and any other place in which we can share the good work we are doing in our libraries.

It is long past time for us to become the national leaders and standard bearers in information and media literacy instruction. My hope is that one day in the future when we Google "define: media literacy," instead of seeing a link to the website of an organization that closed over three years ago as the first result, we will see a school library website, or possibly even the website of one of our national library organizations.

I try to embed all of the activities that I do with teachers, students, and the community at large within the framework of school library advocacy. I approach every interaction, teaching opportunity, or chance to communicate with others who may not be familiar with the work that school librarians do as an opportunity to share not only what we do, but why it matters to our students, teachers, communities, and, in the case of information and media literacy, the future of our democracy. This is serious work—work that must be shared with others outside of our profession so that they can see school librarians as media literacy leaders who make our communities, our nation, and our world a better place.

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