
PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS WITH INFORMATION LITERACY

BY PAULETTE MCLEAN JOHNSON

All of us live, learn, and work in the Information Age. We are inundated with information from multiple sources (books, newspapers, magazines, television, billboards, and the Internet) in a variety of formats (print, graphics, multimedia, and digital). Sometimes, it's difficult to tell the difference between fact, fiction, and opinion. At other times, it's a challenge to find information when we need it, and formatted as we wish. According to researchers Lyman and Varian of the University of California-Berkeley School of Information Management, the amount of new information stored on hard drives and other media doubled between 1999 and 2002.¹ Computer expert Sandy Berger estimated that the amount of information transmitted over the Internet would double each year between 2002-2007.² James Appleberry estimates that by 2020, information will double every 73 days.³

The global economy is increasingly information-driven and requires workers with appropriate skills. To effectively navigate through this information overload, educators and students need to be "information literate."

Definitions of Information Literacy

In 1989, the American Library Association Presidential

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Committee on Information Literacy formulated a now-widely-accepted definition of information literacy. It states: "To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."⁴ Two years later, the SCANS Report extended this definition, describing successful workers of the 21st century as competent in "acquiring, using, evaluating, organizing, maintaining, and communicating information."⁵ These definitions stress the importance of preparing people to live and function successfully in the Information Age. How can classroom teachers

and librarians equip students with these "survival skills"?

Teacher-Librarian Collaboration

Both research and international standards for school libraries recommend that teachers and librarians work together to ensure that students become information literate. *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* emphasizes that "collaboration is essential" as librarians work with teachers to plan, team teach, and evaluate instruction.⁶ The Association for Teacher-Librarianship in Canada and the Canadian School Library Association's joint publication, *Students' Information Literacy Needs in the 21st Century: Competencies for Teacher-Librarians*, underscores the central role of the librarian in helping students find meaning from the increasing number of print and electronic sources available.



The document also advocates that schools hire librarians who are skilled in accessing and evaluating information in any format, and who can provide leadership in the use of new technologies.⁷

To collaborate successfully, teachers and librarians must have “shared goals, a shared vision, and a climate of trust and respect.”⁸ Each has a specific role. The teacher understands the characteristics, attitudes, and interests of the students, as well as the course content. The librarian possesses information and technology skills, understands students’ anxiety about the research process, and can help inte-

and successful learning experiences.

Information Literacy Models

Educators, boards of education, library associations, and professional organizations have developed a variety of models for teaching information literacy.¹³ One popular and effective model, used in thousands of K-12 schools, colleges, universities, and corporate settings, is the *Big6 Skills for Information Problem-Solving*. The Big6 has six logical, though not necessarily sequential, stages, each with two subsets. The main stages are described below:

“To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.”

6. **Evaluation**—assessing the search process and the final product in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.¹⁴

Planning With Big6

Teachers and librarians can use the Big6 Model to collaborate and plan instruction. Jodi Kerns outlines several questions the teacher and librarian should consider while planning:

1. What is the assignment?
2. What are the instructional objectives?
3. What Big6 Skills will be incorporated?
4. How will teacher and librarian integrate instruction?
5. Are the resources sufficient?
6. How and when will instruction take place?
7. How will teaching and learning be evaluated?¹⁵

Implementing Teacher-Librarian Collaboration

The librarian must initiate a partnership with the teachers in order to facilitate information literacy instruction. Administrative support, commitment to resource-based learning, and sharing success stories¹⁶ are vital to effective collaboration.

While there will always be challenges to collaboration such as lack of time and resistance to change,¹⁷ Linda Wolcott sug-

grate information literacy skills into course content. The librarian can also help the teacher develop units incorporating a wider range of resources.⁹ When technology instruction is integrated into the curriculum, students will see the connections between school learning and life experiences. However, collaboration requires comprehensive planning, sharing resources, control, risk, leadership, and time.¹⁰

Benefits of Collaboration

A study by the Library Research Service at Colorado State University concluded that test scores increase when librarians work with teachers, provide training to teachers, have input into the curriculum, and manage the technology for the school.¹¹ Additional benefits include more effective use of resources and teaching time, integration of educational technologies and reduced teacher/student ratio,¹² as well as more meaningful

1. **Task Definition**—getting a clear understanding of the problem and the type of information needed to complete a task, solve a problem, or make a decision.

2. **Information Seeking**—identifying possible sources and strategies for obtaining information and determining how to select the best one.

3. **Location and Access**—finding sources and then getting to the appropriate information within the source. This includes knowing how materials in libraries are arranged, and being proficient in using print and electronic sources.

4. **Use of information**—being able to read, view, touch, and listen to the information source; determine what is valuable, and extract the needed facts.

5. **Synthesis**—being able to connect the information for various sources to create a product (a speech, paper, poster, video, or CD) or make a decision that matches the requirements of the defined task.



Student Assignment:

Biographies of Prominent Black Seventh-day Adventists¹⁸

<p style="text-align: center;">Big6 No. 1 Task Definition</p> <p>Students will become knowledgeable about prominent black Seventh-day Adventists.</p> <p>Each student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selects a person of interest. • Uses Big6 skills to find information about the person. • Produces a research paper and an oral report based on information gathered. • Attempts to answer questions posed by the teacher and librarian. (See list in sidebar below.) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Big6 No. 2 Information-Seeking Strategies</p> <p>Students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorm about possible sources of information. <p><i>Primary sources:</i> letters, diaries, interviews</p> <p><i>Secondary sources:</i> books, encyclopedias, almanacs, journal and magazine articles, videos, Internet sites.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Big6 No. 3 Location and Access</p> <p>Students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access school library catalog and databases to find books, articles, and other resources about the person. • Visit other libraries (including teacher's personal library) and archives. • Interview individual or family and friends of individual.
<p style="text-align: center;">Big6 No. 4 Use of Information</p> <p>Students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read, view, listen to information. • Take notes, develop outline, and document sources according to guidelines provided. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Big6 No. 5 Synthesis</p> <p>Students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate information from various sources to produce a paper and outline for oral presentation. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Big6 No. 6 Evaluation</p> <p>Teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determines whether finished product contains necessary information. • Assesses student submissions—Accurate? Neat? Completed on time? Presented creatively? Appropriately documented? <p>Students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess how well information sources met their needs and how the Big6 helped them to accomplish the project.

Questions for biographical research Big6 No. 1 (see above)

<p>1. What makes this person important or interesting?</p> <p>2. In what ways was this person's life remarkable?</p> <p>3. What qualities were influential in shaping this person's life? Give examples that illustrate these qualities.</p> <p>4. What events shaped or changed</p>	<p>this person's life?</p> <p>5. Did this person make poor decisions or overcome obstacles? How did he or she deal with them?</p> <p>6. Did this person have a mentor or older person who provided guidance?</p> <p>7. How did this person act out his or her Christian beliefs?</p>	<p>8. What contributions did this person make to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and black Adventists?</p> <p>9. Is this person a hero or a celebrity? Why or why not?</p> <p>10. What lessons can you learn from this person's life?</p>
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gests the following helpful approaches for librarians:

- Establish good relationships with teachers; be approachable.
- Raise expectations about what the school library program can do.
- Become an expert on the goals of the curriculum.
- Show connections between information literacy and content-related objectives.
- Solicit teachers’ assistance in developing the library program.
- Be flexible in expectation and timing.
- Be persistent.¹⁹

Conclusion

The Information Age has changed teaching and learning. New models of instruction incorporate a variety of sources and formats. Teachers must employ many strategies to engage students and inspire lifelong learning. The school librarian can help the teacher incorporate technology and multiple resources into the curriculum; teach course-related information skills; and promote a climate of cooperation. As a result, students will be able to find, evaluate, use, and communicate relevant information as they prepare

for service to God and humanity. ✍

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13. See Jamie McKenzie, “The Research Cycle,” *From Now On: The Educational Technology Journal* 9:4 (December 1999). Accessed February 22, 2004, from <http://www.fno.org/dec99/rcycle.html>.
14. Michael B. Eisenberg and Robert E. Berkowitz, *Information Problem-Solving: The Big Six Skills Approach to Library and Information Skills Instruction* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1990), pp. 5-31. Examples are the *Information Search Process* by Carol C. Kuhlthau; Jamie McKenzie’s *Research Cycle: Pathways to Knowledge* by Marjorie Pappas and Ann Tepe; Stripling and Pitts’ *Research Process*; New South Wales *Information Process*; and *Infozone*, from the Assiniboine South School Division of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.
15. Jodi Kearns, “Using the Big6 to Plan Instruction and Services,” *Book Report* 19:1 (May/June 2000), p. 23. Accessed February 16, 2004, at <http://www.search.epnet.com>.
16. Baskin, “What the Literature Has to Tell Us.”
17. Ibid.
18. The author and teacher/librarian developed and implemented this assignment for a Grade 9 history class during the month of February, in commemoration of Black History Month. The classroom teacher, Pastor Irvin Dulan, teaches Bible, Spanish, and history and serves as academy librarian. The author introduced the Big6, using another topic. This assignment may be replicated to suit other geographic locations and ethnic groups. For more on the Big6, see the official Web site, <http://www.big6.com>. Biographical questions adapted from “How to Write a Biography.” See <http://www.infoplease.com/homework/wsbiography.html>.
19. Linda Wolcott, “Planning With Teachers: Practical Approaches to Collaboration,” *Emergency Librarian* (January-February 1996), pp. 9-14, quoted in *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (ALA, 1998), p. 51.