

A Place to Stand

By Gail K. Dickinson



“Give me a lever long enough and a place to stand and I will move the world” – Archimedes

Since the earliest days of the profession, school libraries have been establishing standards and guidelines to guide and shape school library programs. For the most part, the standards have shaped what programs are and what they do. Rarely has a set of standards focused on the content and process of what school libraries teach students. The information age has affected most of our personal and professional lives in ways that could not possibly have been foreseen, and as we look into the future as a profession, the content of what we need to teach must focus on what students need to learn in this century.

Education and technology gurus travel the conference circuit to speak to the choir of librarians arguing for the needs for the new modern student, with new modern needs, and the need for new modern kinds of instruction. Web 2.0 has been translated into Library 2.0, and then School Library 2.0. Our students cannot be so easily identified. Some students should be described as 3.0 as they easily convert and subvert even the newest technologies into their

lives. Other students have no access, no opportunities, and live at the extreme end of equity. The range of needs is sometimes overwhelming.

Librarians know a lot about student learning needs as well as student social and emotional needs. Librarians see the entire range of students every day. We see the ones who have mastered the depth and breadth of technology they or their parents can afford and we see the ones who mask their inability to pay by scorning the limited equity of access that our filters and policies allow us to provide. We see the students who cannot keep enough books on hand to read and we see the students who pretend that their lack of fluency in reading is a lack of interest.

Pundits in their pulpits usually point to two documents that point the way for the path to perfection in information use. The first is the new National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) from the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), and the second is the *enGauge* 21st Century Skills: Literacy in

the Digital Age from the North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL). The American Association of School Librarians has added to this national conversation by launching the AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner.

NETS

The previous version of NETS was based on point and click technology. It was basically a list of basic foundational skills students needed for technology use. It reviewed the skills to hook up the equipment in the proper order and the directions for loading, modifying, and saving documents. Presentation skills were at the minimum competency level. Point here. Click this. Save often. The new NETS standards recognize that students and teachers for the most part have these basic technology skills. That is not true for all, but certainly most students and teachers have adopted the use of technology. They share in the national conversation by reading and responding to blogs, using wikipedia, and exuding both skill and enthusiasm at televisiphonernetting.

The new NETS standards go beyond these basic skills and present a new standard for information use. These standards use words and phrases familiar to school librarians, such as creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking.

enGauge 21st Century Skills

The *enGauge* 21st Century Skills project takes a different approach to skills of the future, the workforce approach. 21st Century skills document outlines what workers of the future need to know and be able to do and addresses the wide varieties of literacies that exist today, such as media, digital, scientific, technological, and multicultural, among many others. These standards are divided into four categories: Digital Age Literacy, Inventive Thinking, Effective Communication, and High Productivity. School librarians are comfortable with the concepts and skills outlined in this document.

AASL: A New Set of Standards

AASL is now in the initial stages of distributing a new set of standards for the future. These standards further the aims of both NETS and the 21st Century skills with a bold new look of standards that are practical for the present but flexible enough for the future.

A first impression of the AASL standards is that they are organized differently from previous standards. These are not a narrowly focused curriculum guide or a list of skills ready to plug into content curricula. Instead, they are a broad set of standards for the skills students should have, the ethical and legal responsibilities that go with those skills, the motivations that students have to apply those skills in the context of those responsibilities, and, finally, strategies for assessing their personal information use.

The AASL Standards for 21st Century Learning are standards for this century of library and information users, and

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they put librarians at the heart of learning. The standards start with a set of common beliefs about libraries and learning. These are the principles that strike at the heart of why we do what we do. The common beliefs talk about reading, about technology, about why and how libraries are at the forefront of learning the skills, responsibilities, dispositions, and assessments for both success and survival.

Digging in

So what are the next steps for the practical implementation of these standards? One of the immediate and automatic reactions may be a sense of being overwhelmed at the changes that we as a profession have to make to achieve full implementation of these learning standards. Not only do the traditional information skills lessons at the building level have to change, but the state curriculum framework for information skills has to change as well. School library educators are now working hard to figure out how to incorporate the new learning standards into next semester's round of classes. State associations, finally finished with alignment of the old standards with subject curricula, are moving to begin the process all over again.

New implementation strategies require more than just skills. Like the new standards, these strategies will stretch

librarians to show evidence of their personal and professional skills, dispositions, responsibilities, and self-assessment strategies as related to these new standards.

Implementation Skills

Learning standards are as important as librarians consider them to be. We have to be sure that as a profession we both master and model the skills that students are expected to demonstrate. In addition, librarians will have to have a thorough knowledge of subject curriculum and the opportunities that they present for integration of the standards. Librarians have to be expert teachers and be able to design innovative instruction based on a thorough knowledge of students. Librarians will also need to be able to design assessments to test student learning progress as they move through the learning process.

Implementation Dispositions

Dispositions such as the motivation to read or a thirst for knowledge have always been part of the library profession's expectations for students. Expectations for the professional behavior and attitudes of librarians are also taught in library school, such as a belief that equity of access to information in all formats is a fundamental right of all children or a belief in the freedom to read. The AASL 21st Century skills will also require that librarians develop dispositions.

Librarians will need to be motivated to explore new ways of learning and teaching information skills. Worksheets and Dewey drills have been out of vogue for years but were still practiced in some schools. The new standards require new approaches and will integrate nicely with school reform efforts.

STANDARDS LINKS

enGauge 21st Century Skills: Literacy for the Digital Age. <http://www.ncrel.org/engage/skills/skills.htm>

National Educational Technology Standards (NETS). http://www.iste.org/inhouse/nets/cnets/students/pdf/NETS_for_Students_2007.pdf

AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner. <http://www.ala.org/ala/aas/aas/aasproftools/learningstandards/standards.cfm>

"One of the most exciting aspects of the AASL standards is their far-reaching application to all learners in all subject areas and all learning situations."

Full implementation of the previous set of standards did not happen overnight and full implementation of the new standards will take time as well. The difference perhaps is that this transition may require entirely new approaches, rather than just deleting references to the elements of the old standards and replacing them with the new. This will require flexibility and patience on the part of librarians caught between old state standards and new national ones.

Librarians may have been able to ignore elements of Web 2.0 technologies in the past, but new standards require that students are taught how to manage the multiple literacies that surround them. Librarians will have to use and model their own personal integration of Web 2.0 technologies.

Implementation Responsibilities

One of the most exciting aspects of the AASL Standards is their far-reaching application to all learners in all subject areas and all learning situations. This provides librarians with the responsibility to provide professional growth opportunities to educate peers on new ways of teaching and learning. Library skills lessons, long out of date, will finally have to be redesigned to encourage student learning of dispositions, responsibilities, and self-assessment strategies. This will not be easy work, but it need not be isolated work. The sharing of 21st Century learning standards to build a pool of implementation examples and strategies is the responsibility of all library professionals, regardless of their specific library role.

Implementation Self-Assessments

How will we know when we have achieved full implementation? That is hard to know right now. Certainly the new standards set the stage for re-evaluating traditional models of school librarianship. We have to consider the degree to which our time is directed

towards improving student learning. There are opportunities to construct new program evaluation methods to assess the impact of library instruction outside the school and library walls. These new assessment and evaluation methods must be developed along with the implementation strategies.

Other Thoughts

The implementation of the new learning standards will not be limited to plugging in or matching content skills to information skills. The process of how we are teaching our 21st Century learners has to be reconsidered. It is widely believed that when the bicycle was invented, the only model for a proper seat was the horse saddle. Therefore, the concept of a saddle, a key piece of an old transportation method, was adapted to fit the new transportation method. The possibilities of providing comfort as well as performance was not realized.

In the same way, questions are already starting to be posed as to the relationship between the old 1998 learning standards

and the AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner. There is a danger of adapting rather than adopting, of reformatting rather than reform. These standards are new and different and will require new and different strategies for implementation. The old standards may need to simply be set aside as we rethink our role as a profession.

With the publication of the new standards, AASL takes its place as a true leader in education. Along with the excitement that comes with that realization is a sobering thought. Archimedes never actually moved the world. Whether it was the lack of the place to stand or never finding the lever long enough, we don't know. The library standards give the profession a place to stand. Whether or not we choose to wield the lever to change our world is up to us. ■

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21st CENTURY LIBRARIANSHIP

SKILLS

- Knowledge of subject curriculum
- Ability to design and deliver instruction focused on student learning
- Ability to implement assessments of student learning progress

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Professional growth opportunities to educate peers on new ways of teaching and learning
- Design of lessons to move beyond skills to encourage student learning of dispositions, responsibilities, and self-assessment strategies
- Sharing of 21st Century learning standards to build a pool of implementation examples

DISPOSITIONS

- Motivation to explore new ways of learning and teaching information skills
- Flexibility with transition to the new 21st Century model
- Openness to School Library 2.0 technologies

SELF-ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

- Re-evaluating traditional models of school librarianship
- Re-thinking time spent in activities not directed towards improved student learning
- Evaluating the impact of library instruction outside the school and library walls