School library media specialists from all levels often gather at district meetings to share their war stories. You’ll hear the following concern from elementary folk, “We have to teach the same skills over and over again because the students just don’t remember them.” At the same time, the middle school professionals chime in, “Whatever you teach the students at the elementary level, they still can’t use the library when they come up to us!” Then the school library media specialists in the high schools add their concerns by stating, “What are you folks teaching the students in the lower schools? The students are pretty clueless when we get them.”

Does this mean that school library media specialists have not been actively teaching information skills? Obviously, not! If anything, school library media specialists at all levels have been investing long hours in preparing and implementing lessons. They try to coordinate these lessons with teachers, and, in the best-case scenario, they collaboratively plan and deliver the instruction.

The missing piece in this scenario is whether students have actually been learning. The questions central to whether this student learning is successful are as follows:

- What have they been learning?
- How well have they been learning?
- How can we verify they are learning?

This shift from a teaching focus to a learning focus is a crucial one. School library media specialists must consider not just how many lessons they conduct but whether students have actually been learning the skills taught (Harada 2005). The following are critical questions in assessing learning:

- What do we assess? The important first step is to identify our specific learning target.
- What are we looking for? We need to develop criteria that help us assess how well students achieve the target. The criteria should be stated clearly in terms of the desired behaviors and must be written in language that the students can understand.
- How do we conduct the assessment? We need to select a strategy or tool, which can range from simple checklists to detailed rubrics, to conduct the assessment.
- How will students demonstrate their understanding? We need to design a performance task for students. By participating in this hands-on activity, students can demonstrate their achievement of the learning target.
- How can we use the results to adjust or modify our teaching? By utilizing concrete evidence of what students can and cannot do allows us to use that evidence to improve our instruction.

Here are two examples that briefly describe how student performance in the library media center might be assessed.

**Elementary School Example**

A second grade class is curious about the endangered animals and plants in their state. They want to identify these species and determine how they came to be endangered. They also want to know if there are ways to save them from extinction. Working in pairs, the students want to create a portable exhibit of their findings for display and presentation during the school’s annual Learning Fair held in the cafeteria. Maggie, the school library media specialist, works with Sally, the

Violet H. Harada is a professor in the University of Hawaii’s Library and Information Science Program; 2680 East West Road; Honolulu, HI 96822. Email: vharada@hawaii.edu. Joan M. Yoshina is a retired school library media specialist who has worked in elementary and secondary library media centers in Hawaii. Email: byrony@hgea.net.
teacher, at several points in the unit. One of the skills Maggie volunteers to teach is generating relevant questions. Maggie’s approach to assessment involves the following steps:

1. Identify the learning target. Maggie defines an observable target such as the following: A second grade student will be able to generate at least four relevant questions about a specific endangered animal or plant in the state.

2. Develop criteria for assessment. Maggie writes the criteria for the questions as “we can” statements that the students can readily understand. They include:
   - We can write at least one question that asks for a description of our animal.
   - We can write at least one question that asks for a comparison of our animal with another endangered animal.
   - We can write at least one question that asks how it survives.
   - We can write at least one question that asks why it is endangered and how it might be saved.

3. Select an assessment tool. Maggie determines that a checklist (Figure 1) using the above criteria is the easiest way to check for student understanding.

4. Design a performance task. The students work in pairs to generate question webs that show whether they can create at least four questions that meet the established criteria. They use the checklist to assess their own webs. Maggie and Sally also use the checklist to assess the students’ webs. Figure 2 is an example of a student web.

5. Use the assessment results to improve instruction. As Maggie and Sally examine the students’ webs, they collect the following evidence:
   - All students can write questions that require a description of their animals.
   - About 80% of them can write questions that require a comparison of their animals.

---

**Figure 1: Checklist for Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We can write a question that relates to</th>
<th>For student: Yes or no? Comments?</th>
<th>For teacher/LMS: Yes or no? Comments?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Describing our animal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Comparing our animal with another endangered animal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Explaining how it survives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Telling why it is endangered and how it might be saved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Figure 2: Sample of Question Web**

- What it looks like?
- Where it lives?
- How are they alike?
- How are they different?
- Can you describe the turtle?
- Can you compare the turtle with the whale?
- Endangered: Green sea turtle
- How does the turtle manage to survive?
- How does it protect itself?
- Why is the turtle in danger?
- What is its worst enemy?
- What can we do to save it?
questions that compare their animal with another endangered animal.
• About 50% of them can write questions that ask about the animals’ survival tactics.
• About 50% of them can write questions that ask why the animal is endangered and how it might be saved.

By examining the assessment data, Maggie and Sally decide to have a debriefing session that focuses on the questions that students need to revise. They first introduce examples of clearly worded questions and questions needing more work. They compare the two types of questions and discuss how the second type of question might be improved. Once students seem to grasp how they might revise their own questions, they begin working on them. Maggie and Sally circulate among the students to provide guidance and feedback.

Secondary School Example

Seventh graders in a 7-12 school are building time capsules that they will open as seniors. The language arts, social studies, and science teachers work together as a core team on this project. They present the following scenario to the students:

You are organized as four-member teams to create a time capsule that you think captures something important in today’s world. Each member of the team must contribute an artifact to the team’s time capsule. It can be a photograph, videotape, or actual item that identifies a person, event, or issue that you believe has significantly influenced our thinking or our lifestyles. Along with the artifact, each team member will include a 500-word message that describes the person, event, or issue; and supports why you have made this particular selection for the time capsule. The time capsules will be stored on campus and re-opened at a special ceremony when you are graduating seniors.

The teachers invite their school library media specialist, Brad, to join them. They realize that students must use a variety of resources for background information on their choices. Brad offers to help students hone their note-taking skills. His assessment plan follows:

1. Identify the learning target. Brad identifies his target as: A seventh grade student will be able to take accurate notes that are relevant to his or her information need.

2. Develop criteria for assessment. Brad invites the students to identify criteria for effective note taking. They brainstorm suggestions. Brad and the teachers also have input. Students and instructors ultimately decide on the following three criteria:
   • Notes must be relevant. They must answer the questions that students have posed.
   • Notes must come from reliable sources. Students must carefully cite all of their sources.
   • Notes must be written in the students’ own words. To do this, students must be able to identify key words and key phrases in the sources they use. They must be able to paraphrase and summarize the information.

3. Select an assessment tool. Brad takes the lead in drafting a rubric that is based on the above note-taking criteria. He encourages feedback from both students and teachers before finalizing the rubric (Figure 3).

4. Design a performance task. Students spend four sessions in the school library media center using print and electronic resources. The teachers require students to write their notes on note-taking organizers (Figure 4). The students maintain separate organizer sheets for each question. They use the rubric to assess their own notes. Brad and the teachers divide their assessment work so that they each examine the notes from approximately twenty students.

5. Use the assessment results to improve instruction. When Brad and the teachers examine the students’ notes after the first note-taking session, they realize that many students are copying phrases that they don’t really understand. The language arts teacher volunteers to spend more time with the students on clues within texts that might help them make sense of their notes. At the midpoint, the instructional team members discover that students are not digging deeply enough for information that supports their selections for the time capsule. To provoke more thinking and discussion about this, the social studies and science teachers have the students critique each other’s notes and share where more information might be crucial. Brad works with student teams that need to retrieve more information as a result of the critiquing sessions.

Concluding Tips

If the notion of assessment is daunting, start small. Work with one teacher. Work on one unit.
Focus on specific skills within the unit. The point is to start somewhere and build. There is no need to start from scratch in devising assessment tools. In two of the books that we have co-authored, we offer numerous examples of assessment instruments that might be used with a range of information literacy skills (Harada and Yoshina 2004, Harada and Yoshina 2005). There are also numerous websites that include useful assessment models. For example, a Prentice-Hall site provides samples of rubrics for both process and product assessment (http://www.phschool.com/professional_development/rubrics.html). Tools for examining use of primary sources and cooperative learning projects are especially helpful. Another example is the links to teacher created rubrics offered by the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Stout (http://www.uwstout.edu/soe/profdev/rubrics.shtml). This site includes exceptional rubrics that assess holistic thinking. It also covers rubrics for an impressive range of student products including dioramas, editorials, oral histories, and reflective journal entries.

**In Summary**

Providing tangible evidence about the power of learning through libraries is an enormous challenge facing our profession. It is a challenge we cannot afford to ignore if we are to be an integral part of the school’s teaching and learning community. Assessing for learning cannot be an afterthought but must be a central part of our mission. (Harada & Yoshina 2005, 144).

**References:**

**Figure 3: Note Taking Rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Needs Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notes must be relevant.</td>
<td>All information relates directly to my questions.</td>
<td>All information relates directly to my questions.</td>
<td>My information does not always relate to my questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have enough details to support all major points.</td>
<td>I need more details to support my major points.</td>
<td>I need more details to support my major points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes must come from reliable sources.</td>
<td>I use resources that my instructors and I recognize as reliable.</td>
<td>I am not sure about the reliability of one resource.</td>
<td>I am not sure about the reliability of more than one resource.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes must be written in my own words.</td>
<td>I can identify key words and phrases that help me use my own words.</td>
<td>I can identify key words and phrases that help me use my own words.</td>
<td>I need help with identifying key words and phrases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I can explain the meaning of all words that I use.</td>
<td>I can explain the meaning of most words that I use.</td>
<td>I need help with the meanings of many words that I use.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4: Note Taking Organizer**

| Questions addressed:                                                                 |
| Citation(s) for source(s) used:                                                                 |
| Key words or phrases taken from source | Elaboration in my own words |
|                                                                                       |                             |
|                                                                                       |                             |
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