The Position Statement on the School Library Media Specialist’s Role in Reading, adopted by the AASL Board in February 2009, is a guide to help practitioners build library programs that support every learner’s development in reading. As part of the Learning4Life (L4L) plan to implement the Standards for the 21st Century Learner, this position statement offers specific strategies for school librarians to impact students’ school-based and lifelong learning.

This article explores some of the skills, dispositions in action, responsibilities, and self-assessments to systematically promote literacy through collection development, integrated literacy events, and collaborative teaching of reading comprehension strategies at all instructional levels and disciplines. As the literacy proficiency required to fully function and contribute significantly to society increases, all educators are called upon to ratchet up students’ motivation and engagement to improve reading comprehension. Just as the sun radiates energy from the center of our solar system and the planets orbit around it, so should the library energize the school as the hub and heart of the literacy curriculum.
Library media centers provide students, staff, and families with open, non-restricted access to a varied, high-quality collection of reading materials in multiple formats that reflect academic needs and personal interests.

Opportunities for planned and spontaneous library use best serve learners as they identify, analyze, and synthesize ideas and information by using a wide range of materials in a variety of formats and media. Availability of library resources and professional staff at point of need develops intellectual behaviors that transfer to future academic pursuits, and lifelong academic and public library use.

**Library Access**

Open access at the point of need has been a cornerstone of school librarianship from the very first standards for library media centers through the newly released *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (AASL 2009a). Once youth leave K–12 education, they will use public and academic libraries that place few restrictions on materials, and offer extended physical hours and online access. Therefore, to prepare students for lifelong learning, 21st-century library media specialists, who position their work at the center of their schools’ reading programs, assume full responsibility for guaranteeing that both the academic and personal needs of students are met by developing policies and practices with the fewest restrictions on students’ choice of resources and access to them.

LMSs must develop technological skills to provide just-in-time service to students and teachers. The library website can ameliorate the school library’s limited hours by serving as a central source for electronic databases and resources, assignments, pathfinders, and tutorials. Web 2.0 tools like Twitter or Facebook can broadcast reserves, overdues, and events, while wikis and Nings become environments for planning with colleagues when face-to-face planning time is scarce.

Upon entering the L4L library media center visitors will notice that students are engaged in all types of hands-on, minds-on educator-facilitated and independent learning experiences using a wide variety of media. The LMS and a social studies teacher are co-teaching a lesson in which fourth-grade partners are analyzing...
websites for authority. A middle school team is storyboarding a group science presentation. Three high school students are preparing for a chemistry test by reviewing an online chemical elements pathfinder prepared by their science teacher and the LMS. A special education teacher aide is working one-on-one with a student who is using an adaptive device to record his presentation. Scattered around the library, students are browsing magazines, downloading homework assignments from the Web, reading, and checking out books.

A single LMS—even with a cohort of library student aides—would find it challenging to facilitate learning in this dynamic, multiple-use library media center. Therefore, an LMS must develop advocacy skills to frame staffing and programmatic needs in terms of observable data, student achievement, and curricular considerations. The LMS develops the dispositions of leadership and confidence to advocate for a dynamic L4L library media center.

Library Collections
As the most information-rich, print-rich, media-rich environment in a school, school library media centers are treasure troves for learners of all ages. Since physical access to a wide-variety of reading materials has been repeatedly identified as an indicator of reading improvement (Krashen 2004), school libraries must meet the physical and cognitive needs of readers at all levels of reading proficiency.

With input from classroom teacher colleagues, students, and families, the L4L LMS is responsible for meeting the personal and curricular needs of a diverse population by building collections that reflect and affirm diversity of language, social class, gender, race, sexual orientation, and religion. When planning lessons and units of study with classroom teachers, the LMS explicitly recommends integrating multicultural and international literature. These resources help affirm and challenge our students’ worldviews (Nieto 2000) and help prepare them for working and participating in a global society.

Because some learners prefer reading online and because many unique electronic resources motivate and support students’ literature explorations, an LMS welcomes the responsibility for providing access to sources that support literacy studies. Selection of free resources, such as the International Digital Children’s Library <http://en.childrenslibrary.org> and Worlds of Words: International Collection of Children’s and Adolescent Literature (WOW) <http://wowlit.org>, bring multiple languages, world cultures, and indigenous United States people’s literature into the school. The WOW site includes critical reviews that examine literature with a focus on cultural authenticity and a journal that shares students’ classroom investigations with diverse texts.

Multimedia subscription resources, such as TeachingBooks.net <http://teachingbooks.net>, connect readers with children’s and young adult authors, increasing motivation and enriching teaching. Further, by creating opportunities to increase local and global understanding while enhancing reading proficiency, these resources leverage instructional collaborations. In broadening students’ cultural knowledge the L4L LMS can take a critical stance with regard to how resource decisions are made and model the disposition of openness to divergent values and opinions.

Literacy Events and Motivation
The LMS is passionate about literacy and welcomes the responsibility for events and projects that captivate students and colleagues, so they will become active members of the “literacy club” (Smith 1988) who understand that reading is not a spectator sport (Pelton 1993). Annual AASL and ALA literacy celebrations, such as El día de los niños/El día de los libros, Children’s Book Week, Banned Books Week, and Teen Read Week <http://ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/conferencesandevents/librarypromoevents/librarypromotional.cfm>, and state-wide events such as One Book readings or book award programs,
enable an LMS to orchestrate well-structured events without extensive planning experience.

The dispositions of initiative, creativity, perseverance, and flexibility are evident when experienced school librarians add events and programs that reflect the school’s unique culture, students’ interests, and the academic goals of the school, such as spotlighting culturally-relevant authors or media creators, holding read-ins, facilitating student-choice book clubs, and sponsoring poetry slams. Events that connect curricula with specific genres, such as poetry, book titles of visiting authors or illustrators, and other library resources can engage readers. While taking a leadership role in these events, LMSs hone their skills as collaborative members of the learning community by inviting buy-in from students, faculty, staff, and parents in planning and volunteering for these events.

Involvement is a key goal of the L4L library: the LMS facilitates active, rather than passive, learning experiences for all. Students eagerly embrace literacy learning experiences, whether they stem from classroom or library assignments. They ask thoughtful questions of a visiting author. They choose and own their learning in literacy projects. They create promotional materials for literacy events and promote them during daily announcements. Not only do they perform their original poems at the poetry slam, they help plan the refreshments, set up the room, and invite their friends and families. Teachers and administrators co-sponsor these events through co-planning, giving students credit for their participation, or providing funding. As a result, all stakeholders will refer to the L4L library as “our” library.

Curricular and Personal Use of Library Resources

Acquiring library resources is only a prelude to the curricular integration of literature and information in all genres and formats. By collaborating with classroom teachers, the L4L LMS knows the curriculum and is able to determine which resources match learning objectives. This is a pivotal skill that helps develop a shared commitment to student success. Moreover, the LMS has the responsibility to advocate for student-use of alternative texts, such as magazines, emerging media, graphic novels, and audio- and e-book editions of studied novels, so that readers with various learning styles and preferences are able to attain 21st-century literacy.

Dispositions such as persistence, flexibility, social responsibility, and teamwork are evident when an LMS co-plans, co-teaches, and co-evaluates. From assignment design, which includes opportunities to read, write, listen, and speak, to grouping students to maximize their intellectual success, the LMS must skillfully negotiate with other educators during collaborative planning to advocate for learner choice in resources and performances, and differentiation in both instruction and demonstration of knowledge.

With a multi-year perspective on the information-seeking skills and strategies students have practiced or mastered, and a site-level perspective on curriculum and disciplinary knowledge, the L4L LMS draws connections among teachers across grade levels and disciplines. The LMS contributes to advancing learning objectives by informing the social studies teacher that students have already learned to locate and cite images in their language arts class, or reinforces instructional practices by explaining to the fourth-grade teacher that fifth graders will also practice finding evidence for opinions during literature discussions. In collaboration with the principal, the LMS aligns the objectives of the library program with the school’s academic goals and submits to the administrator evidence of the library’s impact on instruction. The L4L LMS partners with administrators and colleagues to foster a school-wide culture of collaboration.

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Classroom teachers, reading specialists, and library media specialists select materials, promote the curricular and independent use of resources, including traditional and alternative materials, and plan learning experiences that offer whole classes, small groups, and individual learners an interdisciplinary approach to literacy learning.


Reading comprehension strategies help students make meaning. They include assessing and using background knowledge, posing and answering questions that are appropriate to the task, making predictions and inferences, determining main ideas, and monitoring reading comprehension as well as the learning process. An LMS can contribute to students' reading proficiency by co-teaching these reading comprehension strategies and integrating research-based instructional strategies (Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock 2001) into classroom-library lessons. Our 21st-century learners must also become adept at determining authority and accuracy of information, and analyzing and evaluating that information to synthesize new knowledge from multiple resources. Researchers studying online reading comprehension identify these skills as essential to comprehension (Leu et al. 2007).

In the L4L library media center, educators work in teacher-LMS teams to develop creative and interdisciplinary learning experiences, to support one another in assessing students’ understanding and progress, while lowering the student-teacher ratio at the point of instruction. By taking responsibility for integrating resources in all formats, co-planning and co-teaching off- and online reading comprehension strategy lessons, and co-assessing students’ work and then revising the lessons, the LMS demonstrates a commitment to empowering all students to become successful learners in the twenty-first century.

Inquiry and Reading

Inquiry is a learning process. Inquiry-process models can include learners considering their own background knowledge and developing questions to frame their investigations, applying skills to “determine accurate answers, generate new ideas and interpretations, and make appropriate decisions and conclusions” (AASL 2009a, 14). When learners apply or present their new knowledge, they complete the cycle by reflecting on their process and product, and may develop new questions for further exploration. Inquiry can be guided by the teacher, or pursued independently by the student. Learners who practice any part of the inquiry cycle can be said to practice inquiry skills.

Without the ability to read effectively, students limit their options for inquiry. Reading comprehension objectives found in language arts standards are aligned with the Standards for the 21st-Century Learner (Moreillon 2008). Inquiry-process skills are found in all content-area standards. An LMS must be skilled at integrating standards and aligning learning objectives from many disciplines to design, implement, and assess literacy learning.
Evidence-Based Instruction

An LMS is responsible for understanding the research related to reading. Membership in education associations, such as the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English, and reading their publications is critical for keeping up with research and trends. The L4L LMS can swap journals and articles with classroom teacher and reading specialist colleagues as a way to generate shared understandings of best practices and to improve collaboration by applying research to instructional decision making. Subscribing to RSS feeds, and following and participating in the blogs of education and technology leaders are also ways to take responsibility for keeping current in the area of reading. Another is to attend workshops and conferences with classroom teachers and literacy specialist colleagues to build one’s own skills, as well as the knowledge base of the learning community.

Evidence-based practice involves educators in using research in three ways. Evidence for practice requires that educators use research to guide their decision making regarding the processes of instruction. Evidence in practice involves collecting locally generated data during the teaching and learning process; educators use formative assessments to measure students’ outputs (understanding of the content and processes of their learning) based on the educators’ inputs. Evidence of practice is reflecting on student outcomes, sharing results with stakeholders, and using evidence to guide subsequent instructional decisions. Evidence-based practice results in continual improvement for both students and educators, and provides an LMS with evidence for advocacy (Todd 2007).

Along with classroom and reading specialist colleagues, library media specialists provide and participate in continual professional development in reading that reflects current research in the area of reading instruction and promotion.

An inquiry approach to teaching is key to the success of LMSs. In the L4L library the LMS participates with colleagues in job-embedded professional development. A visitor in this library will see educators working in partnerships and teams to study published research and locally gathered data, and to design instruction based on research. These educators will model the joy of discovery and the excitement of learning new ideas and trying on new perspectives. Along with students, they will demonstrate the risk-taking dispositions inherent in Learning4Life.
Summary
As collection developers, as school library media center advocates and policymakers, and as instructional partners, LMSs are in a critical and unique position to team up with colleagues to elevate the reading development of students. With AASL’s Position Statement on the School Library Media Specialist’s Role in Reading as inspiration and as a guide, LMSs can position their work at the heart of the school’s reading program. With these components firmly in place, LMSs can serve as literacy leaders who exhibit the skills, dispositions in action, and responsibilities of literacy teachers and who engage in self-assessment to continually improve their own practice and the dynamic contributions of the school library media center to student learning in reading. The L4L library can be as essential to the life of the learning community as the sun is to life on Earth. Lead your library program into the center and become the energetic force behind the 21st-century literacy program at your school.

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Works Cited:

The following materials have been posted online for your download and use:

The Position Statement on the School Library Media Specialist’s Role in Reading
http://ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslissues/positionstatements/roleinreading.cfm

Toolkit: (including the Self-Assessment Form)
http://ala.org/ala/issues/toolkits/slmsotherroles/cfm