**Reflection -** LM5030

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In looking back over the past six weeks, I am much more aware of the controversy of print vs. electronic resources. It is also important to create pathfinders to help steer students through the vast array of information to the most relevant and reliable sources. While creating the path provides tools to efficiently use research time and resources, it is imperative that we teach students how to locate and evaluate sources to increase the success of self-directed learning in their future. Today’s teacher becomes one more piece of a mosaic that becomes the puzzle that is each student and if we can work together through collaboration, we can ensure the pieces have a clearer picture when put all together. Working as a library media specialist (or any position in a library) means working with students with the spotlight on today’s assignment while assisting the building of a foundation on which they will erect their own future. Everything we do from instructing and providing opportunities to grow through choosing the resources to highlight and provide for their use needs to answer not only the question of “how will this help them today?” but also be able to address the question of “how will this help them become self-directed, life-long learners?”

Electronic resources can provide up-to-date information on a vast number of topics accessible from anywhere with internet access, however, print resources do have their place and function. When power, equipment, or web accessibility are unavailable or erratic, print resources can come to the rescue, but they need to be made available for use. For that reason, it is essential, in my opinion, to spend money on keeping print resources relatively current. While it may be advisable to reduce the number of general encyclopedias, it is still important to have a set or two that are recent in the library. This particular resource would be useful in several different activities including learning how to use an encyclopedia, accessing information, and comparing how information can change over time. Regarding print resources, I found that it may be preferable to focus more of the budget on specialized subject encyclopedias and reference materials. Specialization allows for easier replacement of materials that have frequent information changes such as technology and some of the sciences. Rather than having to live with inaccurate materials when a planet is downgraded or a country becomes more than one country because such a small proportion of the material available is incorrect, the relevant resources can be economically replaced to reflect the new/revised information. Stocking the stacks requires that the LMS be well-versed in curriculum standards across grades/subjects and be able to envision connections and opportunities for collaboration that will benefit the students and maximize use of resources.

That curriculum literacy will shine the light on where resources are needed and the opportunities for joint ventures between classroom teachers or other unified arts teachers and the LMS. It is trickier to create collaborative plans than creating isolated plans because you need to connect and communicate with at least one other person and sometimes a team of several teachers. Being able to provide suggestions for which route to take or which stops to make can make the journey successful not just for the students but also for the teaching staff.

The itinerary of the collaborative journey can be used to create a pathfinder to help students navigate the trip as well. Similar to providing information/fact sheets about stops on a historic trail, pathfinders highlight resources that are reliable to be used to aid in the journey towards understanding a topic and meeting curriculum standards. Online pathfinders and the ability to transmit information to students in an electronic form make use of pathfinder more successful as students are able to click on links rather than being required to type URL’s that are sometimes quite long and tricky. Pathfinders also give students a place to come back to should they wander off the path as is so easily done on the Internet.

Should they find themselves away from the more controlled atmosphere provided by pathfinders, it is imperative that students have received training in how to independently find information and how to evaluate the source of that information and the information itself. Practice is necessary and there are great sites to emphasize that looking good and sounding good do not make the information valid. I love the Pacific Tree Octopus site and plan on using the All About Explorers site when the upper grades get ready to work on their Explorer unit. Both provide examples of information that isn’t completely correct and the explorers site goes so far as to mix correct and incorrect information which provides opportunities for discussions on how to determine which pieces are correct. Here is also where citation and copyright law need to be taught/reviewed since information a student reports is only as good as the site it was retrieved from and using someone else’s ideas (correct or incorrect as they may be) demands giving credit to the originator.

In six weeks time, I have studied what resources to use to provide information for students, how to provide pathfinders to traverse the seas of information while scaffolding the evaluation process so they land on islands rich in relevant information. When landing, they should find collaborative partners and activities awaiting them that will give them authentic experiences to use resources to gain information that will answer the questions asked of them. These experiences help build a pattern of information-seeking to answer questions that will serve them well as they search to find the answers to the questions that burn in their soul, thus fulfilling the goal of creating self-directed life-long learners.