

Note: This is the second of a series on the Big6™, the most widely used approach to information problem-solving in the world. Students go through the Big6 stages—consciously or not—when they seek or apply information to solve a problem or make a decision. In addition to considering the Big6 as a process, the Big6 can be viewed as a set of basic, essential life skills that can be applied across situations—to school, personal, and work settings, and to all subject and grade levels. Students use the Big6 Skills whenever they need information to solve a problem, make a decision, or complete a task. Each article includes a brief overview of one Big6 stage by Mike Eisenberg, followed by articles by two exemplary Big6 teachers, Barbara Jansen and Rob Darrow, offering practical uses of the Big6 in elementary and secondary situations, respectively. Melinda Tooley and Mike conclude the set by introducing a specific function of the new software product, Big6™ TurboTools, relevant to that Big6 stage.

Information seeking strategies is a mind-expanding stage of the information problem-solving process. Students are encouraged to think broadly and creatively. Information seeking strategies is also easy to teach: for any assignment (e.g., homework, paper, project, exam) or personal task (e.g., buying a gift, selecting a TV show to watch, choosing a college), have students brainstorm all possible sources. Then, have them choose the best sources to use for the particular task—along with the reasons why they choose those sources. Having good reasons for selecting sources is just as important as choosing the most relevant ones.

I like to emphasize this two-part nature of information seeking strategies: brainstorming and choosing. Two examples of the first part (Big6 #2.1, Determine all possible sources) include:

- Generating a list of all potential information sources—print, electronic, and human—for a given information problem.
- Recognizing the full range of technology sources: online databases, news and discussion groups, as well as the Internet.



By Michael B. Eisenberg

The second part (Big6 #2.2) is selecting the best possible information sources—in a particular situation and

at a certain point in time. It is not only important to determine the range of sources, but it is vital to examine the sources to select those that are most likely to provide quality information to meet the task as defined. Two examples of Information Seeking Strategies 2.2 are:

- Questioning the reliability of a Web site created by a 10-year-old student.
- Stating that accuracy, ease-of-use, and completeness are three important criteria for choosing one source over another.

When starting a report or project, students tend to rely on the usual sources. These days, they are most likely to turn to the Internet. A few years ago, it might have been books, reference materials, and magazines. There are other sources that they generally overlook, including local and regional topic experts or agencies and museums. Students might greatly enhance their projects by consulting these sources. Students must first think broadly about all types of sources. They must then narrow and select those sources that really meet their needs in terms of richness of information and availability. Brainstorm and narrow—these are critical thinking skills that can be developed with children of all ages.

Identifying the range of all possible sources and even selecting the best sources can be fun, but it is not very helpful for solving a problem unless the students are able to actually retrieve the information they need. The Big6 recognizes this dilemma by requiring that students have the

skills to locate and access information. However, that's a discussion for the next stage, Location & Access. ■

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The Big6™

1. Task Definition

- 1.1 Define the information problem
- 1.2 Identify information needed in order to complete the task (to solve the information problem)

2. Information Seeking Strategies

- 2.1 Determine the range of possible sources (brainstorm)
- 2.2 Evaluate the different possible sources to determine priorities (select the best sources)

3. Location and Access

- 3.1 Locate sources (intellectually and physically)
- 3.2 Find information within sources

4. Use of Information

- 4.1 Engage (e.g., read, hear, view, touch) the information in a source
- 4.2 Extract relevant information from a source

5. Synthesis

- 5.1 Organize information from multiple sources
- 5.2 Present the information

6. Evaluation

- 6.1 Judge the product (effectiveness)
- 6.2 Judge the information problem-solving process (efficiency)

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