

# Creating Revolution, Big6 Style

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***Note from the Editor:***

*JaDene Dennison, one of our favorite Big6ers, has started a new chapter of her career with a library media position at a brand new school. This article is the first in a series chronicling her effort to implement a successful Big6 program in her new school.*

I retired this past June from Sunrise Elementary in Smithfield, Utah. I had been there for fourteen years. Sunrise Elementary - a kindergarten through 2nd grade school – was my dream school because I love teaching young children. Before Sunrise, I worked for two years at Mountain Crest High School in the same district.

But, it turned out that my retirement was short-lived. I retired only to have a principal call and ask if I would consider coming to his school, Providence Elementary, a kindergarten through fifth grade school. The principal reported that he had interviewed applicants for the library media position but had not been able to find the right match for his school and thought I might be interested.

**Getting Ready**

After thinking about it I decided to take the job. It would be a new challenge and a lot of fun. New grade levels, new students and a great faculty to work with. The first time I walked into the school I was excited to see that Big6 signage was already posted in the library. I remember thinking, “This is great! The children will already know Big6 and I can just build on it and really get the new students using Big6.” I spent the summer cleaning and rearranging the décor of the library, so I was ready for the arrival of my new students.

I was only able to work 3.75 hours a day for the first four months, so I had to be ready to walk in, teach, and walk out. The school hired an aide to check in and check out the books and keep the library running so I could do all the teaching. It was going to be so much fun and I could not wait to “kick it up a notch with the Big6.”

I am an experienced Big6er, so I had my Big6 curriculum ready to go. I had my usual crazy Big6 introduction lesson plans ready to teach - these lessons are real attention grabbers. Things like “What’s In the Bag,” “Zoom Can You Recreate It?,” “Put the Nails on the Nail,” and so on. I also had many of my Big6 picture book lesson plans ready to go.

**A Mystery Develops**

Then something strange happened. A fourth-grade teacher from my new school contacted me over the summer with questions related to Big6 and its application. The teacher was taking a workshop and Big6 was one of the topics. The workshop participants had been told to ask their school librarians if they wanted more information about Big6. I had assumed that since the Big6 signage was in the library, that the previous librarians must have taught it or at least used it. However, it seemed that this teacher knew nothing about Big6 until this workshop.

I asked the teacher about the Big6 posters hanging in the library and she said, “What posters?” She had seen them but they meant nothing to her - proof positive that it is not enough to simply give lip service on Big6. She even went so far to ask me if I was going to be teaching it this year. This was all very crazy to me since Big6 has been a part of the library media core for many years and all librarians should be teaching it. Between the Big6 posters decorating the walls and the teacher’s seeming lack of

knowledge of Big6, I was left wondering what the true state of my new school's Big6 program really was.





In my district we are very lucky to all be certified teaching librarians -this is not the case in Utah generally. I naturally assumed that all of the librarians in my district would be teaching Big6 and making it a priority. Judging from the conversations I had with the teachers in my new school, I assumed wrong. Yet when I talked to the former librarian of my new school, she told me she did teach Big6 lessons. So where was the missed communication in this school?

The key to this mystery lies in something seasoned Big6ers have always known - the importance of teaching Big6 in the context of solving an information problem. It turns out that my predecessor taught Big6 in isolation and did not reinforce the real-world importance of Big6 skills. Teaching information literacy skills in context is essential for success, and helping students understand how Big6 can be used in everyday life and/or real-world situations reinforces the concepts that much further. In essence, students should learn to use Big6 as a set of life skills that will make them life long problem solvers and learners. Teaching the skills in isolation – for instance, just to do a research paper or a library skill sheet - is a waste of time and effort.

### **The First Day of School**

Now that I had a better understanding of my new school's history with Big6, I was prepared to meet the needs of my new students. I started with a fourth grade class. On the first day, I like to start by introducing myself, and as I discuss the day's lesson, I use Big6 "lingo." In other words, I teach and reinforce Big6 by using the key terms to approach all problems. The first question out of one of the boys was "What is this 'task' stuff?" A bit of a shaky start, but this question indicated that I had to approach this a little differently.

I asked the class, "What do you know about Big6?" Not one student could tell me anything about it. I can remember thinking, "How can these students not know Big6 when it is all over this library?" I found that this lack of Big6 knowledge was true for all of the classes I saw in the first week. I only had five students who knew anything about Big6 and they were students I had had at my previous school where I

had taught them Big6. Yes, out of 687 students only 5 knew anything about Big6. So what is a librarian to do? Obviously, I needed to use Big6 skills to solve the problem.

### **Approaching the Problem**

My TASK was to start a school-wide Big6 revolution at the beginning – the same way I had for the past fourteen years. This is a simple statement of a difficult task! But drawing upon my Big6 toolkit and my past successes, I knew it was possible.

Making Big6 second nature for my students requires a couple of different strategies. One is formal Big6 instruction - I will talk more about that in a future article. The second is to model good Big6 behavior. This means modeling Big6 for students, teachers and parents at every opportunity. This reinforces the language of Big6 and shows how the approach can become second nature when approaching any problem.

I have a Big6 cheatsheet posted at my desk that reminds and inspires me to use this powerful tool. Here are my Big6 tasks I have listed at my computer in the library to make sure I am teaching all the steps:

### **My Big6 List:**

- If you do not use Big6, they will not use it or want to learn to use it.
- Everything you do is an information problem - Big6 it!
- If I can teach them to solve their small problems then they can solve their big problems.
- Everything I teach should be taught through Big6.
- My entire discipline should be done through Big6.
- Use Big6 vocabulary.
- Model it, model it,
- Then model it again.

For example, the first time my students come into the library I introduce myself as both a librarian and a problem solver. We then start a discussion on the problems we have already solved today. I inform them the first problem I solve each day is getting out of bed. This always causes my students to laugh and I always have one that says “Mrs. D., that is not a problem!” It is the perfect time for me to teach them that I look at the word “problem” as “EVERYTHING WE DO!” It is a new way of looking at the word, but I believe that if my students can solve small problems they will be more able to solve the big or serious ones that come along.

Big6 gives me the opportunity to teach not only information research skills but also life skills. As we continue the discussion, I have every student tell me a problem they solved that day. These problems range from packing their lunch to deciding what to wear to completing a math quiz - all of these are information problems! Then I tell the students that we will be learning to sharpen our problem solving skills using the process called Big6. We then briefly go through the six skills. We also then go over the rules of the library. I use the Big6 vocabulary to teach my rules and everything else I teach.

### **What Comes Next**

What I have described above is just the beginning of my journey to turn the students and teachers of my new school into seasoned Big6ers. In future articles, I will describe the next steps I took, and suggest ways that you can do the same in your school.

In the meantime, I really suggest that you try modeling Big6. Start with something simple - when a student raises her hand and asks a question, don't simply give the answer. Approach it through Big6, and most importantly, use Big6 vocabulary to show how you arrive at the answer. It may feel like you

don't have any time to spare in the already-packed day, but trust me, any time you spend on this now will pay off in the future. You might even have your students coming to the library asking "What problems do we get to solve today Mrs. D?" or "Do we get to have more fun solving problems?" or "Big6 is so much fun!"