

12-31-2013

## The Importance of a School Library Media Specialist

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### Recommended Citation

Mashriqi, Khalida (2013) "The Importance of a School Library Media Specialist," *Journal of Research Initiatives*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/jri/vol1/iss1/10>

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### BEST PRACTICE

People have the notion that the school library media center's sole purpose is to provide a place where children read books. They also have the notion that a school library media specialist is the reader of those books. Yes, books are read in a library media center but that just touches the surface. When people had correct information about the position of a school library media specialist and the learning which takes place in a library media center, perceptions would be different in schools and this change in perceptions would help promote student learning (Lance, 2001).

A library media center should be the hub of the school, where children engage in reading, writing, and research (Scholastic Research and Results, 2008). A skillful school library media specialist knows exactly what to do for the students, teachers, parents, and the community. Many school administrators and leaders are not aware of the important role a library media specialist plays in the school. Furthermore, many are not aware of the importance of a library media center. Several elementary school libraries are closed because the school administrators are unaware of the importance of the library media center for teaching and learning. Teachers have the idea that the books in the classroom library are sufficient for their grade level students. Having classroom libraries are important but it is nothing compared to a library

media center. Leveling the classroom libraries is important for the students to keep track of their reading but labeling students or limiting their reading takes away from their learning. As stated, it is good for classroom purposes but for a library media center labeling and limiting is not an option.

It has been reported that some school administrators use the library media specialist as a cluster teacher, having them cover classes instead of having them perform the duties of a library media specialist should be performing (Mashriqi, 2011). They also have expectations from the media specialist that are unrealistic and oftentimes become problematic. For example, with the common core state standards, library media specialists are required to conduct duties, the same as classroom teachers. Administrators, in some sense of the word cannot be blamed for not fully understanding the duties of a library media specialist. However, with training, they may change their minds on certain aspects of the library media specialist roles and on how to utilize their expertise.

With the current budget cuts, it is imperative that administrators make decisions that best benefit their schools. It is possible to note, however that school administrators provide flexibility and work with the library media specialist for the overall academic performance of students

(Neuman, 2003). Schools do have limited funds but are expected to provide more for less. When schools do not perform beyond expectations, they are sanctioned or penalized, which results in the school suffering. Administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the community are more stressed than before. Expectations for school personnel far exceed the norm and this pressure brings about a negative effect on student learning. This stands to reason why administrators and teachers must understand the important role the school library media specialist plays toward teaching and learning.

What is the role a school library media specialist? Well let's begin with the main role of promoting the love of reading in students. Reading is an essential component to learning. As the common core has currently stressed, reading is in all subject areas, whether it is math, writing, history, science, or foreign language; reading is necessary (Mashriqi, 2011). When students do not have an interest and love to read, they tend to suffer in all subject areas. School library media specialists are trained professionals who help instill the love of reading, thus helping students in the entirety of their learning experience (Lance, 2001).

Helping children acquire a love for reading is one of the main purposes of the library media specialist. Another important factor is that the library media specialist helps students with organization and on understanding how to locate information for their projects or topics of interest. Therefore, teaching students how to utilize the library media center helps students in two ways. The library media specialist helps students with the skills to locate, collect, organize, evaluate, analyze, synthesize, and cite information for their reports. These skills are beneficial throughout the academic career as early as

elementary school through college and beyond.

The assessment skills for library media specialists are mentioned in the common core standards and library media specialists have the same accountability as other K-12 personnel. Secondly, when students understand the organization of the school media library, it helps students when visiting other libraries in the United States, whether it be a school library, a public library, or a college library, they are all organized in the same way. Retaining these skills earlier will help students throughout their entire life. Obviously, librarians will always be there to assist and guide students but having these skills will make life easier and will support students' learning.

An additional major component taught by library media specialists is research. Research is an integral part of society. Currently, research is usually conducted through technology. As students know it, let's Google it! Research moves far beyond Google; it's not that Google is bad to use but rather needs to be used appropriately because not all the links from Google or any other search engine are reliable. Technology is an amazing tool and if students are taught to use it safely and properly, they can really learn and take advantage of these tools. This can indeed help their future and the future of their country. However, many students do not use technology properly, causing them trouble with others. They use chatting websites, networks, and other tools in the wrong way. Students should understand that these are essential tools when used properly. Providing too much personal information on websites can penalize their futures and could lead to inappropriate behavior from unauthorized and unwanted people, such as predators or hackers (Neuman, 2003).

Besides these tools, students should be taught how to locate reliable information for their school projects and other topics they want to learn about. A library media specialist teaches students which search engines are reliable and scholarly. They also teach students how to locate accurate information. Although, technology is an essential part of student learning, students must also understand the important use of other tools, like DVDs, books, audio players, and such materials that will help them gather pertinent information for projects or topics. (Scholastic Research and Results, 2008).

These are just a few of the major components that a library media specialist provides for students. Additionally and importantly factors, such as collaboration with staff members, parents, and the community. Teachers and library media specialist are charged to collaborate regularly to help reinforce the skills taught in the classroom. Obviously, each grade level have its own set of standards to meet annually and teachers need assistance to help students with their projects and learning on each grade level. When teachers collaborate with the library media specialist, it tends to make a huge impact on student learning (New York Comprehensive Center, 2011). The library media specialist can greatly assist and support the classroom teacher on many levels. One level is providing students and teacher with appropriate resources including: (a) specific books, (b) websites, and (c) other relevant materials that will help students learn and complete their reports. Another level is that library media specialist can teach students how to research topics properly and help students locate adequate information for their projects. Finally, these skills could help students have a thorough understanding of their reports and collecting information could help ensure that teachers' classroom

common core standards are met. If certain students are still struggling, the library media specialist is able to assist them on different levels, such as helping them understand and gather information for their reports. In other words, library media specialists should not create separate lessons to teach students' subject areas and should not be assigned the task of aligning subject area to the common core standards, which are the duties of the classroom teacher. Library media specialists should closely collaborate with teachers and help students with gathering pertinent information for their reports (New York Comprehensive Center, 2011). It should be clear to both teachers and administrators, that library media specialists are supporting tools to help assist teachers in meeting the standards in the classroom. Consequently, library media specialists usually create lessons for students seasonally to celebrate and observe monthly events and holidays. Students are taught about important dates and happenings from history.

Parents and communities also play a major role in supporting classroom teachers and students with retrieving research for school reports (Neuman, 2003). Library media specialists can conduct seminars to help train parents in obtaining the necessary skills to help their children. These seminars will teach parents skills that are important. The school library media center is limited to the amount of resources due to lack of space and grade level materials, which is the rationale for parents and community to be familiar with the space in their local public libraries. Public libraries are a great way to strengthen the skills taught in the school library media center because students are moving to the outside world and beyond the classroom. When students utilize the skills taught in the school library media center to the public library, this

ensures that they are learning and gathering pertinent information for their futures.

Discussed were a few roles of library media specialists. Behind the scenes, library media specialists: (a) read reviews, (b) order books to align with the curriculum, (c) order books to promote the love of reading, (d) take care of the entire media centers collection, (e) update the technology in the library, (f) is aware of the latest information, (g) know and understand the latest technology, and (h) help everyone with reading and research needs. Library media specialists wear

different hats in any given day, but the main hat is that of information specialist! When school library media specialists have flexibility in scheduling, administration support, teacher collaboration, parent involvement, and community outreach, it makes an enormous difference for the entire school, student learning, and the community (Neuman, 2003). All being well, it should be documented and understood that school library media specialists do more than read books to children.

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