

School Library Journal's

Learning

Q U A R T E R L Y

Assessment and Evaluation



CASE STUDY

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You *Need* the Library to Meet Standards

Librarians recently reported a baffling paradox: Some teachers are avoiding their school library to focus on state standards solely in the classroom.

School libraries are not baby-sitting services. They're not places to fill out worksheets. And they're not places for simple support. Today, when assessment and achievement matter, expensive school library programs can't afford to substantiate those myths. If anything, school libraries are a place where teachers and librarians can work together to meet and surpass those state standards. Students are invigorated, learn to think more critically, and expand their research skills.

"Teachers who observe directly the power of good library programs never want to return to the days when librarians only wanted the books on the shelves," said Dorcas Hand, a librarian from the Houston Public Schools.

When a teacher moves from the classroom into the library, the first benefit is the technology-rich environment. The librarian, especially one who is fully credentialed, is a professional partner who can navigate through some of the data smog emanating from the Internet and other information sources.

The librarian will assist the teacher in achieving state standards in three ways not possible in the classroom. The components include: adding information literacy, enhancing learning through technology, and increasing the amount read by students.

Focusing on the Learner

Rather than concentrating on the agendas of the librarian and the teacher, what happens when the focus turns to the learner?

One popular way to understand this concept is to create a set of rubrics—detailed expectations of what the learner is to know, understand, and demonstrate during a learning experience. Generally, these rubrics are created to measure content knowledge as described in a set of state standards.

We wondered what would happen if the teacher and the librarian enlarged the view of rubrics to include both teacher and librarian expectations. What would happen to the amount learned? Learner behavior? Teacher-librarian collaboration? To find out, 26 librarians from across the country, including some of their teacher partners, were surveyed and asked to comment on what happens when the focus of the school library media program turns to achievement at the learner level.

It became obvious as we read their comments that we had tapped seasoned professionals who have seen it all. They've had hundreds of requests to work in the library "just to get out of the classroom." They've also been asked to provide busy work for "quicky" research reports. More unsettling, librarians reported that teachers, feeling pressed to meet standards, are avoiding the library. It was clear from the respondents that if teachers brought their learning experiences to the library, scores would be higher.

"Library media programs with accountability and assessment as integral components support, promote, and even accelerate overall student achievement," said Ann Mausbach, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction for the Liberty (MO) Public Schools. "Library media specialists must identify instructional needs, measure progress, and monitor and adjust for improvement."

Dramatic Results

A number of things happen when teachers and librarians team up to create a rubric that measures content knowledge, information literacy skills, the contributions of technology, and the amount of reading that was done.

Going to the library no longer is seen as a blow-off class, but rather a place where students are more interested and motivated, librarians said. Students see themselves as successful researchers. They also discovered there is more to information literacy skills than instant messaging and e-mailing. Students were more confident and successful, with those students reading at or below level experiencing the most improvement. Students were surprised to learn library online databases were superior to general search engines, and were more critical of Web sites.

"When we measure what a student has or hasn't learned vis-à-vis an assessment tool, we have fairly objective data as the basis for why and how we do what we do," said librarian Candice Irby of Bakersfield, CA. "If students aren't learning, we need to change what we're doing either as individuals or teaching partners. Only if we get involved in the assessment process will we ever really know the real outcome of what we do as information specialists."

True Partners

Respondents reported that when the assessments of the teacher and librarian were combined, their agendas were more aligned. The teacher and the librarian developed lessons based on essential questions. The rubrics and the resources were added to the library Web page to allow students and parents access from their homes. Teachers realized that information literacy skills could be applied across various subjects, not just the lesson at hand.

Partners could then evaluate the success of the learning experience and plan for future improvements, librarians said. Librarians gave more time to each student to guide them through the experience. The assignments became more authentic, helping the learner understand that learning does not take place in isolation in school or in life. Students also began to see the value of print sources relative to Web resources. Tired book reports and printed Web pages gave way to higher quality products utilizing critical thinking skills. Students realized there was more than one way to find an answer.

Teachers were more open to librarians being true partners in the teaching and learning process, rather than just filling a support function. By team teaching, both librari-

ans and teachers were able to utilize their strengths resulting in an improved learning experience for the student.

The Effects

Librarians without clerical and technical assistance find it nearly impossible to have an impact. Without adequate support staff, the million-dollar investment in the library is nullified. It's as if the hospital has been built, the equipment installed, and one person is doing everything—admitting, operating, nursing, and cleaning. A few patients may be saved; the rest are on their own.

All librarians, regardless of staffing levels, can do a few collaborative programs to enhance learning during the year. Those with larger staffs can devote the majority of their time to such activities. If, for example, support per-

Implementing library-based learning

Here are some suggestions for implementing a successful teaching program using library-based learning.

- Build an information- and technology-rich environment in the library.
- Staff the library with a professional teacher-librarian and clerical and technical personnel (the latter to "run the operation," allowing the teacher-librarian to teach).
- When a teacher and librarian collaborate on a learning experience, they begin with a state standard.
- Next, the teacher and librarian build a rubric that assesses content, information literacy, the contribution of technology, and the amount of reading students are required to do during the learning experience.
- Students become aware of exactly what they are expected to learn and do in an information- and technology-rich environment.
- The teacher and teacher-librarian co-teach.
- Both partners assess how well students meet state standards through the rubrics.
- The partners realistically assess their own success and modify their strategies.

sonnel costs a school \$30,000 annually in salaries and benefits, allowing the number of effective teaching experiences to increase exponentially, then that school possesses a very cost-effective method of boosting achievement. Suddenly, the huge investment in print materials, technology, and space for the library begins to pay huge dividends.

Will it work at your school? By adding up the high-quality collaborative learning experiences one by one, the impact begins to show, particularly when such experiences extend across the faculty, departments, and grade levels.