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Tapping Into the Skills of School Librarians

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Tapping Into the Skills of School Librarians

School librarians are teachers first and foremost and can contribute to student instruction as well as professional development for staff members.

The goal of teacher evaluation is to improve teacher effectiveness. Although other related goals—such as performance assessment, improvement plans, and merit pay—may certainly exist, the primary goal of the teacher evaluation process is to improve instruction. Where does the school librarian fit in this process?

In most states, librarians are required to hold teacher licensure, which means that they are trained not only as school librarians but also as classroom teachers (Jesseman, Page, & Underwood, 2012). Your school librarian has a background in a content area, in a curriculum, and in instructional design and has a specialization in library and information science. He or she is an expert in information literacy, media literacy, and digital literacy—skills that your students must have to be successful when they go to college or join the workforce. In fact, the school librarian’s curriculum consists of 21st century standards—critical skills, dispositions, responsibilities, and self-assessment strategies—that integrate with classroom content to ensure college and career readiness (American Association of School Librarians, 2007).

Evaluation Scenarios

Your school librarian is a master teacher, well-positioned to be an instructional leader. When you evaluate your school librarian, identify his or her strengths and areas of expertise and then plan how to fully use those assets to improve instruction in your school. The following scenarios show different ways to evaluate your librarian’s performance, what you might see during those evaluations, and how you might use those findings to provide staff development for your entire faculty.

SCENARIO ONE: FORMAL OBSERVATION

Your librarian has collaborated with a classroom teacher on a research project to give students the opportunity to create authentic products that demonstrate their learning. Rather than the traditional research paper, students are allowed to present their findings using Animoto, Blabberize, Glogster, MakeBeliefsComix, Prezi, or Xtranormal. You spend 45 minutes in the library observing a lesson at the conclusion of the research project. The librarian helps the students create their products, has worked with the classroom teacher to create the rubric by which the products will be evaluated, and will evaluate the products with the classroom teacher.

This librarian is fully connected to what is occurring in the classroom, is effectively integrating technology into instruction, and is helping the students become better critical thinkers and information producers.

SCENARIO TWO: INFORMAL OBSERVATION

While making an informal observation in the library, you see the librarian facilitate a lesson that focuses on reading comprehension strategies. As students take notes for an assigned research project, they identify the main ideas in informational texts, look for supporting details, summarize the texts, and synthesize information across texts. The librarian tells you that effective note taking is an area of weakness that was identified in pre-assessment data, and you know that students have trouble detecting the main idea and supporting details in the reading portion of standardized tests. The librarian also tells you that at the end of the lesson, the students will use GoogleDocs to report on
how comfortable they feel with the concepts they learned about, the skills they used during the lesson, and where they are in the note-taking process.

This librarian is practicing data-driven instruction that is connected to the learning needs of the students, is working to help students improve in skills that cross content areas, and is using formative assessments to drive instruction.

SCENARIO THREE: PORTFOLIO
You are reviewing your school librarian’s portfolio, and you are particularly impressed with evidence of the librarian’s work in the areas of building positive and professional relationships and working in a collegial and collaborative manner with the community. The portfolio includes a printout of the library’s Facebook page, on which the librarian posts information regarding upcoming events and activities in the library—author visits, book fairs, father-son book clubs, Battle of the Books, and more. The Facebook page has more than 600 likes! The portfolio also includes a printout of a library web page that has links to databases that the school subscribes to, pathfinders the librarian has created to support research in the classrooms, copyright information and online citation tools, and vetted websites as well as the websites of local academic and public libraries.

This librarian is effectively using web tools to keep the local community informed regarding library happenings and to provide 24/7 access to library resources for students.

SCENARIO FOUR: SELF-EVALUATION
Your librarian has completed a self-evaluation, noting areas of strength and areas for further growth for each performance standard. As you read through the librarian’s analysis of what has worked, what has not worked, and what type of changes she intends to make to improve her performance, you are struck by her
Librarians work daily to provide students with learning opportunities that require problem solving and higher-level thinking skills. They support reading instruction and promote reading for pleasure.

use of her personal learning network (PLN). You find that she uses her PLN to stay current on school library issues; to follow experts in the field; to gather lesson ideas from colleagues; and to get answers for professional questions, such as which web tool meets a particular instructional need and the exact title of a book that the 10th grade English teacher read in elementary school and wants to find again.

This librarian not only knows how to set up and use a PLN but also gathers tips on instructional resources through her PLN connections.

In Your School
When you evaluate your school librarian through formal and informal observations, portfolios, self-reflections, or other means, you won’t see the exact activities noted in the previous scenarios. But your librarian contributes to the positive learning environment in your school by leading similar learning activities: “The mission of the school library program is to ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information. The school librarian empowers students to be critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information” (American Association of School Librarians, 2009, p. 8).

Librarians work daily to provide students with learning opportunities that require problem solving and higher-level thinking skills. They support reading instruction and promote reading for pleasure. They teach students to locate information efficiently, to evaluate information critically, and to use information productively. They focus on helping students become ethical consumers and producers of information. Through those activities, they demonstrate that they are instructional leaders within their schools.

Staff Development
A 2007 Indiana study revealed that “across grade levels, better-performing schools tended to be those whose principals placed a higher value on LMSs [library media specialists/school librarians] providing in-service opportunities to classroom teachers” (Lance, Rodney, & Russell, 2007, p. 6).

The librarian in each of the previous scenarios could use the areas of expertise he or she demonstrated during the evaluation process to provide staff development:

• Scenario one: an inservice on student use of web tools to create alternate, authentic products to present information
• Scenario two: a workshop on teacher-librarian collaboration and how to make the library an extension of the regular classroom or a workshop on using such tools as GoogleDocs to collect student feedback and assessment data
• Scenario three: an inservice on using social media to connect to the local community or an inservice on the various information resources linked from the library web page and how they can be used by students
• Scenario four: a workshop on the value of PLNs and how to create a PLN.

Librarians are master teachers and collaborative instructional leaders in schools, with a broad, cross-grade knowledge of curriculum and of standards. They are information specialists who are knowledgeable about print, electronic, digital, and technological resources and can work with all teachers and students within the school. Through the evaluation process, you can identify your librarian’s areas of expertise. Match those areas of expertise to your teachers’ staff development needs to improve the teaching and learning that takes place in your school. PL

REFERENCES

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