

LIS 610  
Philosophical Position Paper  
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## **Information Literacy Assessment: A Critical Component to the School Library Media Program**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Because of recent economic conditions, school libraries across the nation are in danger of losing funding and certified school library specialists are at risk of losing their jobs. In a recent article entitled *Libraries Feeling Pinch of Slumping Economy*, Brandt states budget deficits across the nation are leading to situations such as in Philadelphia where Mayor Michael Nutter has proposed closing 11 library branches (Brandt, 2008)<sup>1</sup>. Advocacy is more important than ever; however, as Todd (2008) posits “Advocacy without evidence is just self-interested opinion.”<sup>2</sup> This statement underscores the importance of using assessment as a way to demonstrate the value of the school library media program.

In addition to illustrating student learning, assessment can be used to guide the school library media specialist and his or her students in the learning process. Some librarians may argue that assessment is the responsibility of the classroom teacher; the school media specialist does not have enough time in the day to take part in the process. Others librarians maintain that they use assessment when they collect basic data such as the number of books checked out or the number of classes taught. Although these statistics provide valuable data for planning and advocacy they do not directly measure student learning.

In 1998, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) published Information Power which outlines nine information literacy standards for student learning in the following three areas: information literacy, independent learning and social responsibility. These standards demonstrate a shift in focus for the library media specialist. Librarians are no longer just the keeper of books, but they now play an integral role in teaching students how to evaluate and use information effectively. As it is described in Information Power, the standards “focus on the process of learning rather than dissemination of information.” (AASL/AECT, 1998).<sup>3</sup> It is my belief that this change in paradigm needs to also be reflected in the types of assessments used in the library. Librarians need to know if they are achieving the desired outcomes of instruction.

#### **SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS ROLE AS TEACHER:**

In the *AASL Position Statement on Instructional Classification*, school library media centers are described as classrooms and school library media specialists are described as teachers.<sup>4</sup> These statements negate the belief that the role of assessment is the sole responsibility of the classroom teacher. If the library is a classroom and the librarian is a teacher, then the learning needs to be measured and the librarian is the one responsible for it.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) also recognizes school library media specialists as teachers whose teaching can be measured to meet standards for professional teaching excellence (AASL, 2006).<sup>4</sup> In the

professional field of education, assessment is recognized as part of the teaching process. Asselin (2003) describes “teaching and assessment as two sides of the same coin. Indeed a major view is that assessment IS instruction.”<sup>5</sup> Because one of the roles of the school library media specialist is as a teacher, it is imperative that school librarians adopt instruction that includes assessments that measure student learning.

### **EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE:**

In “Working Smarter: Being Strategic about Assessment and Accountability,” Harada relates that school librarians may feel that they are already gathering a lot of assessment data and have little time to incorporate more. For instance, it is not uncommon for librarians to collect quantitative data such as collection size, new acquisitions, total classes taught, lost or damaged book counts and student attendance. However, Harada explains these statistics are indicators of inputs only as they do not measure the amount of learning that has taken place. (Harada, 2005).<sup>6</sup> As mentioned previously, Information Power has created a shift in the school library program and the types of assessment utilized need to align with these standards. Although quantitative statistics describing program inputs are useful, taken alone they do not offer any information about the effect of the library program on student learning.

Assessments that measure learning outcomes as opposed to typical library statistics are a part of a larger idea referred to as evidence-based practice, an idea first discussed by Ross Todd from Rutgers University. Geitgey and Tepe (2007)<sup>7</sup> describe the three steps to understanding how evidence-based practice is incorporated into library programs. First, librarians must become familiar with research that shows how school

libraries impact student learning. With this knowledge at hand, librarians combine what they have learned with their own insights in the field to affect student learning. Last, librarians collect evidence in their own schools to illustrate how their program is making a difference. This last step is one that has potential to boost the librarian's efforts at advocacy. The librarian will use appropriate assessments to measure learning outcomes and the results of these assessments should then be shared with the school community for the purpose of gaining support for the library program. Administrators, parents, teachers and students are all members of the learning community that either directly or indirectly have influence on library funding and staffing.

Harada (2005) reminds us that when making decisions about allocating funds and staffing positions, administrators want evidence built on systematically collected data.<sup>6</sup> In my personal experience, the administrators at the school I taught were always happy to support programs and ideas that were backed by evidence and a plan. They did not go out of their way to solicit these teachers that wanted to start programs; rather, the teachers who had an idea and presented evidence-based data in support of the project were almost always given the opportunity. This example illustrates the connection between evidence-based data and advocacy.

In Assessing Learning: Librarians and Teachers as Partners, the authors remind us about the joy that parents get when receiving forms of assessments such as portfolios. Portfolios consist of student work collected over a period of time. Parents are able to view samples of their children's work and see firsthand the learning that has taken place. (Harada & Yoshina, 2005).<sup>8</sup> In my teaching career parents have been some of my best

advocates. When they recognize the learning that has occurred in the classroom, they are always happy to share it with administrators.

Evidence-based practice utilizes multiple sources of evidence to support claims of student learning. Todd states “By using and comparing data from a number of sources, you can develop stronger claims about your practice’s impact and outcomes.” Many different types of assessments exist and are useful for measuring learning outcomes found in Information Power: student interviews, portfolios, journaling, rubrics, surveys, pre and post test measures, student-generated products, and observations (Todd, 2008).<sup>2</sup>

#### **PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT:**

In Enhancing Teaching and Learning: A Leadership Guide for School Library Media Specialists, Donham (2004) stresses the importance of using both formative and summative assessments. Formative assessments are used during the learning process to check for understanding and identify what may need to be reviewed; whereas, summative assessments are performed at the end of a learning unit and are useful for accountability. By using both formative and summative assessments, librarians are able to continually improve the learning process and at the same time collect evidence-based data.<sup>9</sup>

Donham also describes the four purposes of assessment; two for teachers and two for students. When used during the formative period, assessment can inform the student and improve his or her performance on an assignment.<sup>9</sup> For instance, a checklist used at the midpoint of an assignment allows the student to evaluate his or her own work and ensure they are on the right track. During a summative assessment the teacher evaluates student achievement and recognizes accomplishments.<sup>9</sup> For example, a student-teacher

conference at the end of an assignment gives the teacher an opportunity to highlight what the student was able to achieve and offer genuine praise for a job well done.

Teachers also benefit from incorporating assessment into student learning. When teachers use assessment during the formative phase of an assignment, they are able to check for student understanding and when needed make adjustments to improve instruction. Assessment at the end of an assignment can be used to evaluate and make changes for future lessons if necessary.<sup>9</sup> In a lecture for LIS 693 Administration of School Library Centers, guest speaker Patricia Louis illustrated the benefits of using pre and post tests. By collecting data about what students know at the start of a unit, teachers and librarians can pinpoint student weaknesses and identify areas needed for growth. In her science unit example, 33% of her students passed the pre-test; whereas, 100% passed the post-test (Louis, 2006)<sup>10</sup>. These statistics are also useful for advocacy.

Librarians that are reluctant to incorporate assessment into their literacy instruction may be overwhelmed with their already full schedules; however, the above description of the four purposes of assessment illustrates that the benefits outweigh the initial time investment. At the school I previously taught, the librarian expressed some interest in adopting the use of assessment practices. Because she was often expected to cover duties outside the library, she explained that assessment became one of the things that took a backseat. Preparation of checklists, rubrics, portfolios, conferences and journaling may take some time, but are important to attaining the ultimate goals of the program: student achievement. If student learning is not taking place, it is vital that changes be made. By preparing a checklist or rubric for students to follow, teachers are setting clear criteria that help guide the students through the assignment. Students have

an easier time achieving the desired outcomes and the teacher has to spend less time re-teaching the concept.

In my personal teaching experience, I have found rubrics to be especially useful for both formative and summative assessments. By providing my students with a clearly designed set of criteria at the onset of a project, students are armed with a tool to achieve success. They know what will be used to evaluate their work at the end of the project and they can continue to use the rubric to make improvements.

When I first began teaching I did not always use a rubric for projects; I felt overwhelmed with my work load and couldn't find the time to create them. This sentiment is shared by many beginning teachers and/or those teachers that are not familiar with creating and using rubrics. After using them for some time now, I realize they actually save time and make the grading process much easier. Assigning grades is less arbitrary and judgmental. **This is further evidenced by the following. During a middle school faculty meeting at my previous workplace, a teacher gave a brief introduction and demonstration about designing rubrics. After this, many teachers began to use rubrics and found the experience beneficial to their instruction.**

Yoshina and Harada (2007) highlight the benefits of allowing students to help in creating rubrics. When students construct the rubric they have a better understanding of what the expectations are and are more eager to strive for quality. Yoshina and Harada recognize the efforts needed for rubric design and implementation and share some anecdotes from school librarians to illustrate that the benefits clearly outweigh the costs: "If something needs correction, I refer to the rubric. Usually, the student knows what I

mean and makes the adjustment by himself.”<sup>11</sup> This statement reveals the utility of rubrics.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Assessment is a useful tool for school librarians. When school librarians document and collect evidence to show the relationship between their school library media center and student achievement, they are helping to secure funding and staff positions at their library. In addition, they are able to improve instruction and student learning.

Information Power has changed the direction and focus of the library media center. In addition to a place to check out books, students are taught skills to evaluate and produce effective products with the information they find. Information Power has given purpose to school library media centers and highlighted the contribution that libraries make in student learning. In order to continue to be recognized as a place of learning, it is my belief that school library media specialists across the nation need to collect evidence-based data to share with the learning community.

## Works Cited

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### Corrections:

1. In regards to the citation style, I left all book titles, such as Information Power, underlined because I used MLA format throughout the paper; in MLA style, the title of a book is underlined.

2. I did not change the quote “Assessment IS instruction” because the author used capital letters for the word “IT”.

3. I corrected the position of the date on one of the citations as you pointed out and removed “Dr.” before Todd.