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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at how the goals for school library media programs are aligned with the goals of education in general and what this alignment means in terms of the allocation of resources. Citing the 1983 report, "A Nation at Risk," it argues that there may be a disparity between the actual value of the school library media program and its perceived value by people outside the library profession. The implications of this dilemma are pointed out and an evaluation study conducted in a rural school system in North Carolina is detailed to illustrate the points made. Twenty fourth-grade students were randomly selected from each of four schools (as determined by school administrative staff and ranked according to their compliance with school library media program guidelines); two of the schools had the highest ranked media programs and two schools had the lowest ranked programs. Standardized achievement test data in the areas of reference skills and reading were then gathered for each student and T-tests were conducted to test hypotheses of group differences. Students in schools with good library media programs scored significantly higher on both reference and reading skills, suggesting that the quality of the library media program may be related to student achievement. Statistical results of the study and a 10-item bibliography are included. (THC)

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THE SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA PROGRAM'S IMPACT ON THE GOALS OF EDUCATION:
RETOOLING THE MESSAGE

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The School Library Media Program's Impact on the Goals of Education:
Retooling the Message

In presenting the contributions of the school library media center to its publics, it is a common practice to focus on the activities of the library media specialist. In other words, contributions such as planned instruction in media skills as well as reading, viewing, and listening guidance are mentioned. Providing materials and equipment appropriate for student learning is discussed. Mentioned is the leadership provided in computer and other media selection. Often cited is the role of planning with teachers both for media skills integration as well as the evaluation and selection of materials. Of course, there are other activities that are frequently mentioned.

What is becoming increasingly evident is that this particular approach in the message to establish the library media center's importance may not be carrying the impact library media personnel would like. Library media programs are still suffering cuts in personnel and budgets in many areas. (Comparative statistics from N.C. Department of Public Instruction, 1983). Recognition of this problem is becoming even more evident when state library media organizations identify the improvement of the image of the media specialist as a critical area of activity. This too may be found at the national level (Opinion and Attitude Survey Report, 1984). There appears to be a disparity between the actual value of the school

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school library media program and its perceived value by those outside the library profession. One begins to recognize that there may indeed be a problem when the much-publicized report A Nation at Risk: The Imperatives of Educational Reform fails by omission to acknowledge the importance of school library media centers (A Nation at Risk, 1983). In response, the library profession was forced to publish its own accounting of recommendations for library contributions to excellence in education (Alliance for Excellence, 1984). In analyzing the dilemma, it becomes more readily apparent that the issue may center on the content of the message that library media personnel send to their publics rather than on any deficiency in actual contributions to the educational goals of schooling.

The Focus of Educational Goals

A survey conducted by Policy Studies in Education is informative. This not-for-profit educational research and development organization headed by Henry Brickell asked teachers, students, and the public to identify the most important things for students to learn in school (Brickell, 1980). Figure one reveals a trend toward viewing the goals of education as acquiring and developing those basic skills necessary to function as a life-long learner.

Insert Figure 1 about here

These findings are substantiated by A Nation at Risk. Further, a recent

report by a committee appointed by the National Academy of Science points out ten basic competencies essential to perform entry-level jobs and to continue learning throughout life. Among these skills are command of the English language, ability to comprehend written material, and use of basic math (National Academy of Science, 1984). Schools across the nation have instituted testing programs that measure student achievement in reading, math, and writing. There is a strong push to monetarily reward high test scores in some states. Though the goals of education are always the subject of debate due to the wide array of constituencies that schools are obliged to serve, the current push is for competence and achievement in those areas highlighted by the Brickell study as well as A Nation at Risk (Wirt and Kirst, 1982).

Implications

The implications for those concerned about school library media program growth are twofold. First, the library media center is a component of the total school instructional program. Thus, its goals must be those of the total school. If the current message is analyzed, strategies, not goals, are being presented. Skills in utilizing media, a well-selected and -organized media collection, carefully selected computer software, and all the latest in technology are but strategies toward accomplishment of school goals--development of reading, math, and communication skills, knowledge and understanding in science and social studies, and other skills toward lifelong learning.

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It is critical to talk in terms of outcome goals for the library media program that are aligned with the goals of education in general. This alignment is crucial in terms of the allocation of resources. In times of economic prosperity those who get what they want simply show that they have the need for support. For example, the argument that increased funds are needed for more science books is seldom questioned in times of plenty. Conversely, however, in times of scarce resources--as in today's economy--those who get what they want show that they deserve attention (Bakalis, 1981). In other words, the organizations that receive support in times of economic restraint are those groups that can readily and concretely show that they have done something to deserve consideration. This implies that funding decisions will acknowledge those who effectively demonstrate their critical role in achieving the goals and purposes of the larger organization in which they function. In addition, that group can clearly demonstrate progress toward those goals. In the political sense, the allocation of resources to a program or group expresses the perceived value of that program or group.

An even more critical second implication centers on demonstrating the library media program's impact on educational goals. For the message to focus on library media program contributions to increased student achievement (outcome goals), library media personnel must be prepared to factually support their contentions that they deserve funding more than their equally needy neighbor programs.

An Illustrative Outcome Study

For the purpose of illustrating the above points, an evaluation study was conducted in a rural school system in North Carolina. The hypotheses tested in the study were:

1. Students attending schools identified as having good library media programs will exhibit reference skills superior to those attending schools identified as having poor library media programs.
2. More importantly, students attending schools identified as having good library media programs will exhibit reading skills superior to those who attend schools with poor library media programs.

Since it emphasizes a basic skill currently under scrutiny by public and political bodies, the second hypothesis seems to hold more weight as a powerful and meaningful outcome evaluation.

Procedure

Elementary school library media programs were observed by school administrative staff and ranked according to their compliance with various school library media program guidelines (Media Program, 1973; Media Programs Recommendations, 1981). The schools containing the two highest-ranked programs and the two lowest-ranked programs were selected for participation in the study. The schools in which the programs functioned did not differ significantly in terms of overall socioeconomic status, racial composition, level of funding for materials, or student population.

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Differences between the good programs and the poor programs were noted by observation and interview as follows:

1. Flow of all types of media and equipment in and out of the library media center.
2. Frequency and type of teacher use of media in the instructional-learning process.
3. Frequency and type of student use of the library.
4. Frequency and type of library media specialist-teacher contact.
5. Level of integration of library media skills instruction into the curricular areas.
6. Character of the student behavior/misbehavior in the library media center.
7. Content of the expressed knowledge and attitudes about the library media specialist and library media program by the principal and instructional staff.
8. Level of involvement of library media specialist and teachers in the selection of instructional materials for the entire school.

Twenty fourth grade students were randomly selected from each school, yielding a total sample of eighty subjects. Although a larger sample would have been desirable, a relatively small sample size was deemed to be sufficient for the pilot nature of the study. Standardized achievement test data in the areas of reference skills and reading were then gathered for each student in the study.

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Results

Achievement test data for students from good library media programs and for students from poor library media programs were pooled across schools in the respective categories. T-tests were conducted to test hypotheses of group differences on reference skills and reading variables. Alpha level was set at the .05 level. Results are summarized in Table one.

Insert Table 1 about here

As can be seen in Table one, students in schools with good library media programs scored significantly higher on references skills ($x=512.25$) than students from schools with poor library media programs ($x=485.90$; $t(78)=2.1$; $p<.03$). Students in schools with good library media programs also scored significantly higher on reading skills ($x=487.53$) than did students from schools with poor library media programs ($x=455.30$; $t(78)=2.85$; $p<.006$). These findings suggest that the quality of the library media program may be related to student achievement in the school in which it functions. It should be noted that no attempt was made to select students who had contact with library media and therefore amount of exposure to library media was not controlled. While this may be considered a weakness in the design of the study, it also may reflect an overall level of academic functioning associated with the library media program in the school. Although further studies might control for this variable, the implication that library media programs may be related to

total academic functioning is significant, particularly in the context of the focus of this article. Indeed, the view that the library media program may be embedded in the total school suggests a congruence of goals and accountability that is a major premise of this article.

Conclusion

The tenor of the times in public education suggests that the school library media program must examine its contribution to the goals of education. In order to do this it is important to assess the library media program's impact on student achievement. This means an assessment of outcome rather than of strategies as they relate to educational goals. Detailing the processes or activities within the school library media program focuses only on strategies and therefore does not provide any conclusive data on the value of the program to the student or to the school. However, presenting evidence that those strategies are associated with increased student achievement focuses on results and provides such data. It is imperative that there be support for the contention that the library media program deserves recognition and funds. Data provided by the study reported in this article, though relatively easy to obtain and by no means exhaustive, may provide extremely important and persuasive support for demonstration to the public as well as to school administrators the value of the good library media program. Further studies are much needed in collecting data to support the idea that a good school library media program is associated with important outcome variables such as achievement.

This idea is crucial to the continued functioning and even existence of the school library media program. It is the message the public and the decision makers are listening for today.

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Figure 1.
Results of a Survey of High School Graduation Requirements (Brickell, 1980)

Graduation Requirements (Competencies)	Percent of Respondents
Computes accurately	96%
Knows fundamentals of mathematics	96
Reads with understanding	94
Writes correctly	89
Solves mathematical problems in practical situations	89
Reads to learn	86
Reads carefully	82
Spells correctly	82
Speaks correctly	80
Can follow directions, both written and oral	81

Table 1
Comparison of Mean Achievement Scores by Group

Reference Skills

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation
"Good" Library Media	512.25	52.25
"Poor" Library Media	485.90	59.42

$t=2.11$; $df=78$; $p<.03$

Reading Achievement

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation
"Good" Library Media	487.53	56.03
"Poor" Library Media	45.30	44.26

$t=2.85$; $df=78$; $p<.006$