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Education Reform in Minnesota: Profile of Learning and the Instructional Role of the School Library Media Specialist

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Between 1998 and 2003, a Minnesota educational reform movement named the Profile of Learning (POL) generated high levels of school library media center use in high schools and contributed to the fulfillment of the instructional role of the school library media specialist (SLMS) as described in Information Power . POL consisted of graduation standards with accompanying projects assigned to students to meet those standards. Projects were process-oriented, requiring research, reading, reflection, and synthesis of ideas. School library media center resources and services were increasingly in demand during this era. To learn more about how school library media centers and SLMSs were affected during this reform movement, the researcher sent a survey to 174 high school SLMSs. After the survey results were tallied, twelve interviews were held with selected SLMSs. Although teachers had a negative opinion of the POL era, SLMSs felt energized, important, and effective in their increasing roles of collaboration and instruction in student education during this time. The researcher also contrasted survey and interview findings with past research on the SLMS role. POL was rescinded by the Minnesota legislature before the affects of increased collaboration and resource-based learning could be assessed. The following study examines the roles and attitudes of SLMSs during the POL era, with an emphasis on the increased instructional role.

In Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning (AASL and AECT 1998), there is a logo visuall1( )-1 0(e)4(n)-2 S1 2M S3<e2(r)1(v)1(i)7 2(c)-1(s)3(t)1(a)3(t)1(e)-3(m)1(e)2<(s)1(h)1(o)-1(u)1(l)-1 0(b)4(e)-1 i(n)-2(v)1(o)-1(l)-1(v)1(e)-3(d)1 i(n)-2 i(n)-2(s)1(t)1(r)2(u)1(c)-1(t)1(i)7(o)-1(n)-2 a(n)-1(d) 1(t)1(o) 1(s)1(t)1(u)1(d)-1(e)4(n)-2(t) 1(a)3(c)-1(a)3(d)1(e)4(m)1(i)7(c) 1(a)3(c)-1(h)4(i)7(e)4(v)1(e)4(m)1(e)4(n)-2(t)1.0@# %•, should be directly involved in instruction and contribute to student academic achievement.

The literature of the profession shows that this ideal has been evolving during the past fifty

years, as education reform movements also successively evolved, were implemented, and often

later abandoned. This discussion will look at how the profession perceived its instructional role in the latter half of the twentieth century and what happened to this role and activity levels in the school library media center when a recent education reform movement in Minnesota was implemented.

Craver's Historical Overview of the Changing Instructional Role of the High School SLMS, 1950-1986

Craver's (1986) overview of the evolving instructional SLMS role demonstrates the gradual change in attitudes and practices taking place between the socially complacent 1950s and the disillusioned 1980s when societal problems affecting students seemed overwhelming and unsolvable. With the launching of Sputnik-2(a)4(unc)4(hi)-2(d747.841 0t)-2(s)-1(1 i)-2()-10()10(aude)

nonprint resources, and inadequately informed about the total school curriculum. To help change the landscape, new AASL and AECT (1975) standards, Media Programs: District and School incorporated the instructional role calling for SLMSs to participate in curriculum development and carry out specific instructional purposes. However, research into the SLMS role continued to show the disparity between the real and the ideal. The instructional role was prescribed in the literature, but it was not practiced by SLMSs, who were often not perceived as instructional partners, but providers of information services.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw a sharp decline in the American public's confidence in its schools. A Nation at Risk: An Imperative for Educational Reform by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) defined the problems it perceived in American education: a diluted curriculum with too many choices for students leading to fewer students taking and completing academically rigorous courses. The report warned that America's preeminence in many domains was being overtaken by other nations. As efforts were made to return education to basics and teacher-centered learning, SLMSs continued to forge ahead with their instructional role as evidenced by such publications as The Library Specialist in Curriculum Development (Thomason 1981) and The School Librarian as Educator (Wehmeyer 1984). This was the decade that introduced the computer into the educational process with SLMSs being urged to find ways to integrate this tool into teaching units. Research studies looked at the role of instructional design, finding again that the ideal and the reality did not coincide. Staples (1981, as cited in Craver 1986) determined that SLMSs were more interested in management than instruction. Royal (1983, as cited in Craver 1986) found that Midwestern SLMSs did not carry out many instructional duties.

In spite of the seemingly glacial pace, it is clear that from 1950 to 1984 the SLMS instructional role did evolve and expand. The literature, research, and standards all reflected this development, with the SLMS instructional role usually being fervently promoted well before substantive changes in the field.

While Craver's historical review ends with the year 1984, education reform continued into the 1990s unabated. In order to encourage and support local reform as called for by A Nation at Risk, President Clinton signed into law the Goals 2000: Educate America Act in 1994. This law, built on the theme of strong academic content and the assumption that all children can reach challeng Td [(s)-1(hi)-2(s)-19nhhenh1(l)-dx4(r)3( )-10(t)-2(o e)4(4(a)4(.(n)-10(C(t)-2(e)4(r)v(4(l70(y)2

ranked the top five most important tasks. Principals and SLMSs correlated strongly in their rankings across all the categories. Of most interest here is the Learning category, which relates to the instructional role of SLMSs. The top two ranked tasks by both principals and librarians were related to instruction: (1) provide leadership for the determination of educational objectives for the school library media program as an integral part of the educational program of the school; and (2) plan learning activities and opportunities to enable students to assume an increasing amount of responsibility for planning, undertaking, and assessing their own learning.

Everhart (1992) conducted a work sampling study in which she matched nine pairs of high school SLMSs, one group with automated circulation systems, the other group with manual systems, in order to see how the two systems affected time spent on school library media center tasks. One hypothesis she posed was that SLMSs in automated high school library media centers would devote more time to instructional tasks than would their counterparts in nonautomated media centers. Using a random alarm mechanism (RAM) at each site, she had SLMSs mark down what they were doing on a tally form when the small alarm worn on a cord around their neck beeped. Using a Chi square analysis, Everhart found a significant difference (.05) between the time spent by the two groups on Instructional Development, defined as developing unit objectives, analyzing learner characteristics, and evaluating present learning activities for possible change, among numerous other activities. However, she found no significant difference between the two groups in the Instruction category, which was defined as teaching information skills, providing staff development, and assisting parents in sharing reading, listening, and viewing experiences with their children. In both automated and nonautomated libraries, the task category that received the most attention was administration of the school library media program.

A study of Kentucky's education reform movement and its K-12 media center environment showed a pronounced transition to the SLMS instructional role (Shannon 1996). The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990 was a comprehensive restructuring of both school governance and programs that was massive and varied in its scope. To describe the impact of KERA on school library media programs as perceived by the state's SLMSs and to determine how they were supporting the law, forty-eight SLMSs (out of sixty-one) responded to a series of checklist items and open-ended questions about how their role had changed during this era.

The five specific checklist items and the percentage of respondents answering "yes" to the question "Have any of the following changed significantly since 1990?" were: (1) How teachers use the LMC (88 percent); (2) How students use the LMC (77 percent); (3) SLMS involvement in curriculum design and implementation (57 percent); (4) Library information skills curriculum (74 percent); and the SLMS's role as teacher (66 percent). Additionally, responses to the open-ended questions indicated that technology played a major part in shaping the SLMS role. Teachers were using media center materials more and assigning students more research projects. The heavy use of technology brought challenges as well: funding levels were perceived as being too low; time to keep up with constant changes in equipment and software or to assist teachers and students in the computer lab was inadequate; and the school library media center received no additional personnel to assist with these added responsibilities.

Respondents were asked what they did to promote the school library media center role in implementing KERA's initiatives. Their responses were largely general in nature relating to being supportive and positive about implementing KERA. The overall theme of the more specific responses focused on aspects of leadership and visibility, with SLMS indicating that

- Case Study. Use observation and theory to study human interaction, learning or development.
- New Product Development. Research, develop and test a new product.

A salient characteristic of these projects was that they did not require students to memorize and recite facts. Instead, the projects encouraged a learning process that engaged the student with the material, requiring independent research and critical thinking. Much of this learning process was fueled by the resources in the school library media center.

Student Assessment and Teacher Support

The Minnesota Department of Education (then called the Department of Children, Families, and Learning) (DCFL) maintained a Web site titled Minnesota Electronic Curriculum Repository (MECR). This Web site contained Performance Packages with assessment tasks or assignments and projects that would demonstrate achievement of the content standard. For the content standard of issue analysis in the second group under the Inquiry and Research Learning Area, specifics were given on how the student could proceed. Taken together, these steps were known as the assessment task. For a hypothetical teen issue it was specified that the student would:

- Gather information on past or contemporary issues
- Identify relevant questions or a range of viewpoints
- Summarize relevant background information
- Examine information from each source for bias and intended audience
- Identify areas of conflict, compromise or agreement among various groups concerning the issue; and
- Evaluate multiple positions and proposed solutions for the issue

An assessment task such as this would naturally make heavy use of the school library media center for researching multifaceted teen issues. Some typical research based Performance Packages in Social Studies that potentially could generate school library media center research were:

- Compare world and U. S. perspectives on events and historical developments
- Compare the impact of diverse ideals and beliefs across eras and among world regions

Even mathematics had a suggested research component in which students were assigned to explore the development of the real number system from historical and cultural perspectives.

Reporting student achievement on assessment tasks was problematic. The state required that a rubric system be used with a score range of 0 to 4 that indicated how well the student achieved the required skill as specified in the standard. It was possible for a student to get a 3 on the project, but an A in the course. The schools were required to keep a tracking system showing both a student's grade and rubric score that parents could access.

Such ambitious academic expectations necessitated ongoing support from DCFL. In order to keep the lines of communication open between DCFL and the schools and ensure a two-way flow of information, each school district was required to identify a graduation standards

technician, the key point of contact. Institutions of higher education in Minnesota offering teacher education majors also had to appoint a technician. Other modes of support were:-4-1(t)-a(4-2c

public relations. This section was designed to be easy and interesting to answer, so as to enga the respondent early in the survey and deflect a desire to abandon it.

Section II A elicited information concerning which Learning Areas in POL most motivated teachers to send students to the school library media center. Respondents were asked to choose and rank the top three Learning Areas they believed were related to increasing school library media center use.

To gain an overall view of the pervasiveness of the influence of POL, question II B asked for an estimated proportion of teachers sending students to the school library media center. Question II C built on that theme by asking how much appreciation for the school library media center teachers appeared to develop during this era.

Section III, "Your Tasks", asked for respondents' estimate of the amount of time they spent on each task category. Of major interest to this study was the estimate of the time spent on instruction.

Section IV, "Your Experiences and Feelings", asked for information that could be interpreted by the respondent as being personal in nature, but by this point the respondent was well into the survey and would not be as likely to abandon it even if the questions were slightly sensitive. The literature suggesting that SLMSs are harried and overworked influenced four questions in this section (5, 7, 9 and 10). They were designed to elicit both feelings and actions that suggested a state of overwork and fatigue. Other questions in this section dealt with feelings of energy, enthusiasm, effectiveness, and attitudes toward POL.

Section V (labeled "Other") four questions asked about school library media center materials and technology budgets, and teacher and school administrator visits to the school library media center.

The demographic section (VI) concerned gender, age, years in education, years in the school library media center, and the hours of assistance SLMSs received from aides or volunteers. Demographics about the school and district were obtained from DCFL (since renamed the Minnesota Department of Education) Web site.

Last, it asked for SLMSs who were willing to be interviewed.

Of the 174 surveys sent, 128 (73.5 percent) were returned, with 112 (64 percent) being usable.

Selected Survey Findings

The Learning Areas

The survey asked a variety of questions about the Learning Areas and SMLS exposure. Respondents ranked the top three Learning Areas according to how often they perceived them to motivate teachers to send or accompany students to the school library media center (1).

Figure 1.

Comparison of SLMS Role Increase during POL

Time Spent on Tasks

Section III of the survey asked respondents to estimate the percentage of time they spent on each of ten task categories. Figure 2 shows a comparison among them. Taken together, Instruction and Instructional Development (defined as collaboration and identifying materials for use with classes), consumed 42.25 percent of SLMSs' time. Men spent less time on these tasks (37 percent) than did women (45.25 percent). Clerical tasks were estimated to consume nine percent of SLMS's time. This is more time than they devoted to advocacy, cataloging, or selection of materials. Time spent on technical support showed men devoting 13.6 percent of their time on this and women only 8.3 percent. Men also spent more time on administration (12 percent) than did women (10 percent).

Figure 2.

Comparison of SLMS Time Spent on Task Categories during POL

SLMSs' Experiences and Feelings

Section IV of the survey, "Your Experiences and Feelings," was designed to elicit SLMSs' emotions and attitudes linked to POL experiences. Table 2 shows the range of responses and their means and modes.

Table 2.

Categories and Scale 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly Agree

Experiences and Feelings of School Library Media Specialists Relating to the E the Graduation Standards (N=112)		
Experience/Feeling	Mean	Mode

7. I took work home with me more than three times a week	2.503	2
8. I did more instruction than administrative and other non-instructional tasks	2.60	3

By age of respondent, the youngest aged group and the oldest had the highest mean stress scores (10.8 and 10). By number of years on the job, the least experienced group (1-4 years), had the highest mean stress score (10.19). By student population, SLMSs at the twelve schools with populations of more than two thousand students had the highest mean stress score (10.66).

The Interviews

Survey responses (negative versus positive attitude toward POL), geographic location (rural, suburban, and urban) of SLMSs, and willingness to be interviewed for at least one hour were taken into account when choosing interview participants. Twelve SLMSs were selected to be interviewed. Table 3 shows some of the defining characteristics of each interviewee. School demographics were obtained from the DCFL. Because only high schools were included (grades 9-12) in this study, the mean school population was 1, 137 students with a mean Caucasian population of 86 percent and a mean free or reduced lunch of 20 percent.

Table 3.

Characteristics of Interviewed Media Specialists

Location in Relation

Urban e Bit

because it was just foisted upon them. Teachers were told there were things they must do in their classroom exactly the way the State wants. Teachers should not be put in that kind of a mold,"

their class to incorporate." "Besides that, there was a rubric-based assessment system mandated by the State, an assessment that did not even relate to the student's grade. It was possible to get an A on the project, but only a 3 on a 0 to 4 grading standard rubric scale. Teacher frustration ran high." "Teachers were just inundated. Our district built a computer grading system, but so many teachers went in to enter their 0 to 4s, that it crashed."

These heavy demands necessitated a school-based point-person for teachers to consult. One well-meaning SLMS who liked the concept of POL volunteered to the State to be this person for his school. He soon found that his link to the hated POL meant that teachers associated him and the school library media center with it. He backed off quickly because "you cannot afford to have ill

across the State when he convinced the legislature to repeal POL, and replaced it with a plan for a new content-rich Minnesota Academic Standards (Griesedieck 2003). Teachers were thrilled. SLMSs, on the other hand, said they were sad, "sorry," and "disappointed."

The new content standards went into effect in fall 2003. SLMSs immediately saw a difference in the activity levels in the school library media center. One said there were few classes scheduled to come in. Their research was tremendously dumbed down [illegible]

Instructional Development	14.25	10.00	4.20	10.05%

instructional role, with 66 percent responding that their instructional role changed. Presumably this meant it increased. The comparable question asked of Minnesota SLMSs was to what degree did their instructional role increase. Eighty-nine percent said that their instructional role increased either

Appendix

Survey

No: _____

This Survey is for the Senior High School Library Media Specialist (Grades 9-12, 10-12, or 11-12 only)

If you are not that person,

A. Of the 9 Learning Areas, which 3 do you believe motivated the teachers the most often to send students to the media center? Please rank the top 3 Learning Areas by using the numbers 1, 2 and 3 in the spaces to the left of the Learning Areas.

___ Inquiry and Research

____ World Languages

___ Scientific Concepts and Applications

B. My estimate of the proportion of teachers in my school sending students to the media center for research or assignments relating to the Graduation Standards is (Circle 1):

1 =None 2 = Up to 25% 3 = Between 26 & 50%

4 = Between 51 & 75% 5 = Between 76 & 100%.

C. I believe that the teachers developed a greater appreciation for the media center during the era of the Graduation Standards (circle 1)

1 = Not at all 2 =A little bit 3 = Quite a bit 4 =A lot 5 = I am not sure

III. Your Tasks

Please ESTIMATE WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR TIME you spent on each of the following broad categories of tasks during the era of the Graduation Standards. Please try to have your total come out to 100%

Instruction _____ %

Examples: To classes, or one-on-one. Reference assistance, online catalog assistance, software assistance.

Administration _____ %

Examples: Establishing policies and procedures for media center. Conferring with other teachers or administrators about students or other issues. Student discipline.

Instructional Development _____%

Examples: Collaborating with teachers. Identifying and retrieving materials for use with classes.

Staff Development _____ %

Examples: In-service offerings.

Selection _____ %

1 2 3 4 8. I did more instruction than administrative and other non-instructional tasks.

1 2 3 4 9. At times I felt like staying home from work just to have a day off.

1 2 3 4 10. I had so much work to do, I did not know where to start each day.

1 2 3 4 11. My experiences led me to believe that the Graduation Standards were good for the media center.

1 2 3 4 12. In general, I had a positive attitude toward the Graduation Standards.

V. Other

Circle One Answer Per Question

A. Overall, during the years of the Graduation Standards my media center materials budget (circle 1):

1 = Decreased 2 = Stayed the Same 3 = Increased

If the budget increased, it was due to: (check all that apply)

Administrative decision _____ Referendum _____ Fund Raising _____ Other _____

B. Overall, during the years of the Graduation Standards my technology budget (circle 1)

1 = Decreased 2 = Stayed the Same 3 = Increased

C. Overall, during the years of the Graduation Standards teacher visits to the media center (circle 1):

1 = Decreased 2 = Stayed the Same 3 = Increased

D. Overall, during the years of the Graduation Standards school administrator visits to the media center (circle 1):

1 = Decreased 2 = Stayed the Same 3 = Increased

VI. You

1. Male ____ Female ____

2. Age: 30 or under _____ 31-40 _____ 41-50 _____ 51-60 _____ Over 60 _____

3. Number of years you have been the school library media specialist in any Minnesota senior high media center (grades 9-12, 10-12, or 11-12) in the past five years, not including the 2003-2004 school year _____

4. During those years, on average, approximately what percentage of your job responsibilities were devoted to the senior high school media center? Circle 1:

1 = Up to 25% 2 = 26%-50% 3 = 51%-75% 4 = 76%-100%

5. During those years, on average, approximately how many hours per week did you have aide assistance in the senior high media center? Circle 1:

1 = Less than 10 2 = 11-20 3 = 21-30 4 = 21-40 5 = More than 40

6. During those years, on average, approximately how many hours per week did you have student or volunteer assistance in the senior high media center? Circle 1:

1 = Less than 10 2 = 11-20 3 = 21-30 4 = 21-40 5 = More than 40

IF YOU ARE WILLING TO BE CONTACTED FOR A FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW, PLEASE TELL ME YOUR NAME, PHONE NUMBER, AND E-MAIL ADDRESS.

Name:

Phone:

E-mail:

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY. YOUR OPINIONS AND EXPERIENCES CONCERNING THE MINNESOTA GRADUATION STANDARDS AND MEDIA CENTERS ARE IMPORTANT.

Don't forget to fill out the half-sheet enclosed so your name may be entered in the drawing for a cash prize of $50.00.

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