

The Teaching Role: Are Librarians Teachers?

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I'm still surprised when teachers and administrators underestimate the amount, level, and importance of the library media specialist's (LMS) teaching role. I'm even more surprised when this role is questioned by some of my students and even some practitioners (as in a recent discussion on LM_NET). You have probably found, as I have, that teaching activities often consume a significant portion of the LMS's day, ranging from one-on-one individualized instruction to group training offered to a variety of learning audiences including students, teachers, administrators, library staff, parents, community groups, and school boards.

A search of the ERIC database revealed some early support for the LMS as teacher. Using a wide variety of publications appearing in the library science literature (e.g., opinion papers, guidelines, research studies) between 1951 and 1984, Craver (1986) traced the teaching role of the high school LMS. Her study revealed a progression of support for more of a teaching orientation for LMSs. According to Craver, "(l)ibrarians evolved from providing occasional library instruction to teaching course-integrated units" (p. 37). However, she warns that this evolution may have been more the result of the general sweeping changes in education during that time period than a widespread adoption of the teaching role by practitioners.

With the publication of *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* in 1988, the integral role of the LMS in providing curriculum-integrated information and technology skills instruction was recognized. *Information Power* cited teaching as one of three major roles for the LMS. In that same year, Ormondroyd (1988), advocating a greater teaching role for her academic library colleagues, found research support for involvement in course-integrated library instruction. She discovered a number of positive student outcomes resulting from such instruction, including improvement in the quality of coursework, higher grades, fewer complaints about grading, eradication of plagiarism, and greater retention of research skills, as well as two important outcomes for librarians—greater prestige and improved relations with both faculty and students.

With the publication of *Information Power*, several research studies examining the instructional role of the LMS began appearing in ERIC. For example, Haycock (1989) published a summary of research findings on a number of topics related to professional practice at the K–12 level. Similar to what Ormondroyd reported at the college level, he found that cooperative planning and teaching by the classroom teacher and LMS resulted in greater student competence in research and study skills than when either professional taught alone. Moreover, students rated schools higher when this type of integrated instruction occurred.

Carr (1990) called attention to the urgent need to teach curriculum-integrated, thinking process skills, including critical reading and problem solving, at all levels of education. Around the same time, Millbrook Press commissioned a study examining the changing role of the school library. Using the results of interviews and surveys with elementary, middle, and high school librarians as well as principals and superintendents, *The Millbrook Report* indicated that more than one-quarter (27 percent) of a LMS's time is spent in class instruction and teacher training. This amounted to more than 13 hours per week in which the LMS is involved in teaching activities.

In a study the following year, Ceperley (1991) surveyed more than 2,000 school library media specialists in four states using a 42-item questionnaire to determine their perceived training needs. With a 38 percent response rate, she found that perceptions of the importance of the teaching role differed among LMSs, depending on their differing levels of educational preparation. This finding was consistent with the Millbrook data, which indicated that certified librarians spent an average of over five hours more in the teaching role than those without professional certification.

Tallman and van Deusen (1994) investigated the impact of several factors on the perception and implementation of both the instructional consultation and teaching roles of the elementary LMS. Among the factors they found most enhanced the likelihood of LMSs performing these roles were principal expectations, flexible or mixed scheduling, and more time spent in collaborative planning with teachers.

In a discussion of the school librarian's role in the "electronic age," Simpson reiterates the importance of the LMS's instructional role in teaching both information literacy skills and the ethical use of retrieved materials to both students and teachers. For this latter group, she cites staff development as constituting a significant portion of a LMS's time.

Unfortunately, there have been few studies on the teaching role of the LMS in the past few years. The need to continue to examine this role offers a wonderful opportunity for both researchers and practitioners in the field. The growing importance of technology for teaching and learning has expanded that opportunity. For example, what are the best methods for teaching teachers and students how to effectively use technology for teaching and learning? What is the impact of information and technology literacy instruction on the way teachers teach and the way students learn? Has the need for technology training increased the amount of time the LMS spends in the role of instructor? Is LMS-teacher cooperative planning and team teaching of information technology skills more effective than the same instruction conducted by only one or the other? What kinds of experiences (e.g., courses, internships) must pre-service library and information science graduate programs provide to school library media students to best prepare them for their teaching role? Investigating and reporting the answers to such questions through quality research studies will help to increase our importance within our schools and districts and continue to heighten the stature of our profession.

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