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The role of the elementary media specialist in a literature-based school program

Julie R. Parker
University of Northern Iowa

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The role of the elementary media specialist in a literature-based school program

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe the role of the elementary media specialist as a resource person, collaborating with classroom teachers to extend the literature-base of the school program. The theoretical support for a literature-based school program will be presented. Then many aspects of the media specialist's role will be described.

The Role of the Elementary Media Specialist
in a Literature-Based School Program

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Julie R. Parker
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Date Approved

Jeanne McLain Harms
Director of Research Paper

5/8/92
Date Approved

Jeanne McLain Harms
Graduate Faculty Adviser

5/10/92
Date Approved

Ned Ratekin
Graduate Faculty Reader

6/10/92
Date Approved

Peggy Ishler
Head, Department of Curriculum
and Instruction

A literature base is important in extending the whole language concept throughout the school instructional program. It is composed of many types of literature (books, magazines, newspapers and other reading materials) and works from the different genres (fiction, folk literature, poetry, and nonfiction). In the process of enriching the instructional program through an extensive literature base, the media specialist's role can be enlarged greatly from the "guardian of the books." In this type of program development, the media specialist is a primary resource person, collaborating with teachers.

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to describe the role of the elementary media specialist as a resource person, collaborating with classroom teachers to extend the literature-base of the school program. The theoretical support for a literature-based school program will be presented. Then many aspects of the media specialist's role will be described.

Theoretical Support for a Literature-Based School Program

The whole language concept focuses on children creating meaning through the language processes within whole units (Wray, 1989). The Goodmans (1981) state that the whole language concept is related to holistic activity. Reading, or any of

the other language aspects, are treated at all times as an integrated behavior, never broken into separate skills. The emphasis is always on meaning, and the experiences are expected to be real and relevant.

The goal of a school that is implementing the whole language concept is to help children become avid and capable readers and writers. That goal can only be met when children have ready access to a wide variety of excellent children's literature (Goodman, 1986).

A great deal has been written about implementing the whole language concept into the school instructional program. If the best results are to be achieved, the teacher and the school media specialist need to form a partnership and work together to develop a program that reflects this instructional concept (Schleef, 1990).

Many Aspects of the Media Specialist's Role

The media specialist can offer much assistance to teachers in developing a literature base for thematic units that includes the different genres and related ways children can respond to these experiences. Through references in the media center, teachers can find literature for read aloud experiences, discussion, expressive activity, and pastime reading (Lamme & Ledbetter, 1990).

The media specialist has many skills that will assist teachers in instructional development. The instructional development resource, Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs (1988), compiled jointly by the American Association of School Libraries (AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications Technology (AECT), sets forth guidelines for developing school library media programs needed to prepare students for personal success in the next century. The primary focus of these guidelines is the building-level library media specialist, who is responsible for the design and delivery of effective library media programs.

In Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs, three important roles of a school media specialist are proposed--information specialist, teacher, and instructional consultant. In fulfilling these roles, the media specialist can become an important part of a school's instructional development.

Information Specialist

The school media specialist can be helpful in selecting quality literature from the different genres for a literature-based program. Finding literature works for enriching the school program can be a tremendous help to teachers (Cullinan, 1989). In order to do this task, the media specialist needs to be familiar with the school curriculum (Information Power, 1988).

The media specialist can direct teachers to book selection resources, such as The Read Aloud Handbook, by Jim Trelease (1985); Choosing Books for Kids, by Joanne Oppenheim, B. Brenner, and B. Boegehold (1986); and Booktalk! 2, by Joni Bodart (1985). The volume Choosing Books for Kids also lists non-print materials, such as filmstrips, records, and audio cassettes that can be included in a literature-based program.

Other references that school media specialists can share with teachers as they extend the literature base of the school program include: Index to Poetry (1989) that provides titles as well as the first lines of poems. This reference book is cross-referenced and directs the users to the appropriate poetry books.

In studying authors and illustrators, the Junior Book of Author/Illustrators (1989) and Something About the Author (1992) can provide biographical sketches and a list of selected works.

Many professional journals address the implementation and enrichment of a literature-based program, such as The Reading Teacher, Book Links, Language Arts, and School Library Journal. Each of these journals also offers reviews on selected literature for children. These periodicals can be made available to teachers as part of the professional collection.

The public library is another important reference source. Its Inter-Library Loan Service can access books from across the United States.

An example of how a media specialist can serve as an information specialist is as a classroom teacher organizes a mini-unit on quilts, the media specialist provides a bibliography of the literature works from different genres that are available in the school media center. If other literature titles are not available in the center, the media specialist can provide information for locating them.

The media specialist can develop literature updates to keep teachers informed of new materials available on particular genres, topics, and themes. These new resources can be presented through bibliographies. By inviting teachers to a brown bag lunch session over the noon hour, the media specialist can present booktalks on new books and audio-visual materials that are available in the media center. These sessions can also be organized to address topics requested by the teachers. The media specialist can also schedule an after-school open house occasionally to give teachers an opportunity to browse through the display of new literature and other materials before they are circulated.

Files on community volunteers who are willing to be guest speakers or adult readers can be developed by the media specialist. These files need to be updated regularly. Teachers can use this resource to enhance their units of study.

Teacher

The media specialist as a teacher integrates information skills into the curriculum. Research studies conclude that the most effective way to teach children to value, use, and retain library skills is to relate them to specific study in an extended classroom program (Information Power, 1988).

The school media specialist has a responsibility to assist students and staff as they use the resources and services of the program. Some of the skills to be mastered include: (a) manual searching of the card catalog, the index to the school media center collection, The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature index--a cross-section of children and adult magazines, and the vertical file which consists of a collection of pamphlets and newspaper articles on special interest topics and (b) computer searching of the electronic catalog and encyclopedia and on-line databases.

Also the media specialist can assist teachers in finding descriptors to yield resources from Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), a searching procedure that can provide access to products and services. ERIC is an expensive system for an elementary school, but the information can be accessed through the local Area Educational Agency.

Because teachers and students use a variety of media to produce instructional experiences in a literature-based support

program, the media specialist needs to instruct them in the proper use of the equipment and to provide the necessary supplies. For example, the video camera and the Video Recorder (VCR) are becoming an important part of classroom productions.

The media specialist needs to offer leadership in the interpretation of copyright laws. With the accessibility to photocopy equipment, inexpensive duplication machines, VCR's, and cable television, an environment is created that is ripe for illegal and immoral behavior. Violation of copyright is stealing. For example, copying pages from workbooks and playing a videotape in class that was recorded from a teacher's cable at home seem harmless, but both are criminal activities. Teachers need to be aware of the school board's policy on copyrighted materials. This statement is usually found in the school board policies manual. The media specialist should also have a copy of Copyright Condensed (Revised Edition, 1987) in the media center for a reference on copyright matters.

Instructional Consultant

As an instructional consultant, the media specialist's expertise can help teachers select and utilize materials in the instructional programs.

Developing a literature-based program. The media specialist is an important member of the planning team in a literature-based program. When planning a cross-curricular theme, the media

specialist often has a broader working knowledge of children's literature and is able to suggest other forms of appropriate media, such as filmstrips, audio, video, and films.

As a resource person, the media specialist can collaborate with the teacher to provide in-depth classroom studies of genres, themes, subject areas, and authors. If the thematic unit is school-wide, a media specialist can coordinate the study.

The writer in the role of a media specialist collaborated with teachers to develop a unit on China for grade five. This unit was extended across the curriculum through a literature base, representative of the different genres. Content and the processes from the social studies, the graphic and performing arts, and the language arts were integrated in the unit of study.

The fifth graders assembled in the media center while the media specialist introduced the unit on China by reading aloud the Chinese folktale, Yeh-Shen, by Ai-Ling Louie and illustrated by Ed Young. After reading the story, the media specialist led a discussion and then introduced the five learning centers she had prepared to supplement the ones their teachers had developed. In the center Geographical Features of China, the students had an opportunity to read nonfiction works (books and magazine articles) on the terrain (mountains, rivers, and deserts), the climate, the animals (pandas and snakes), and the products (oil, fish, and rice). In the center Historical Facts of China, the

students could read nonfiction books and then answer questions on the history of this country.

The author center introduced author/illustrator Ed Young through a biographical sketch and a display of his works. The students could compare Yeh-Shen (a variant of Cinderella) and Lon Po Po (a variant of Little Red Riding Hood) with variants familiar to American children.

In the center Chinese New Year, information was presented on this holiday. This center also had an accompanying activity of writing Chinese characters. The students could write their age and name in Chinese.

A listening center provided students with opportunities to listen to the tape of Ming Lo Moves the Mountain, by Lobel, and to view the Reading Rainbow video, Liang and the Magic Paintbrush, by Demi.

The media specialist also assisted in arranging the culminating activity for this unit--a guest speaker who shared slides and personal experiences from a visit to China and presented a display of Chinese artifacts.

Expanding the literature base of a basal reader series.

When the reading program is structured by a basal reading series, the media specialist can assist in extending the literature base and related expressive activities. For example, a story with the image of a quilt in the third grade reader was greatly

enriched by offering these other picture books: The Josefina Story Quilt, by Eleanor Coerr; Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt, by Lisa Campbell Ernst; The Patchwork Quilt, by Valerie Flournoy; The Quilt Story, by Tony Johnston; The Quilt, by Ann Jonas; The Keeping Quilt, by Patricia Polacco; and Tar Beach, by Faith Ringgold.

The media specialist also developed a center on quilt block design. The children used patterns of well-known quilts to construct blocks from different kinds of patterned and plain paper.

The culminating activity, arranged by the writer, was a guest speaker who displayed and explained about her collection of quilts. Then some of the students brought quilts from their family to share with the class.

Assisting with a volunteer program. The media specialist can work with teachers to start a volunteer program to encourage literacy. Two such programs, Rockin' Readers and Star Readers, are provided in this writer's schools. The Rockin' Readers program provides adult volunteers who meet weekly and share literature works with at-risk students. The classroom teacher decides what students will participate in the program, and the media specialist offers assistance with book selection.

Once a month a Star Reader, a well-known citizen in the community, is asked to visit the school to read his/her favorite

picture book or to share excerpts from a full-length fiction. The Star Reader usually reads to a particular grade level or on a special occasion to the whole school. For example, the superintendent of schools read How to Eat Fried Worms, by Thomas Rockwell, to the third grade. A local physician read a chapter from Black Beauty, by Sewell, his favorite childhood book, to the sixth grade.

Summary

The trend toward literature-based instruction results in enormous demands on the school library resources and its media specialist. The media specialist's role as a resource person is an important element in the ongoing instructional development process. By providing bibliographies, updates, and references for book selection, the teachers and the media specialist can collaborate in developing the literature base representative of the different genres for specific units. Also the media specialist can provide instruction in reference skills for students and teachers in the context of the instructional program.

As children enter a world of lifelong discovery, an important goal of the media specialist is to enhance the skills that will make them effective users of ideas.

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