Case Study

Library Media Center at a Dependent School District

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LBSC 5013 – Library Media Center in the Schools

October 5, 2010

Oklahoma State University

Permission to visit the school was granted by the Principal of the school. She was called with the request and when it was explained to her that a case study of her library was part of the Masters Degree Study she enthusiastically agreed and the date for the visit was made. The date of the visit was September 28, 2010.

Upon arrival at the school the student making the case study was introduced to a fourth grade teacher who was to be the student’s guide. This fourth grade teacher, Ms. Senior, has been teaching at this school for over twenty years. She was helpful, delightful, and open about the school and has been a library supporter her entire teaching career. She escorted me to the library as well as hosted me for lunch in the teacher’s staff room. She will be mentioned again in the details of the study.

Case Study: 1st through 8th grade Dependent School located in rural Oklahoma. This school serves 585 students with a modern campus made up of several interconnected buildings, a commons, nice physical education facilities and a very nice library. The library is centrally located with secure entrances and no exits except those that lead into the main hallway. This school is a statehood school. It was founded in 1907 and has been on the same land since its original construction. The school has changed over the years dwindling in student population until in the early 1950’s it was a one room school with one teacher. As the population started to increase in the 1960’s and school consolidation was coming on strong this school become the survivor of school closures and was the receiving home of those other small schools in the community that were closed. This increase in students sparked the construction of new facilities. By the early 1970’s there was a building boom in the vicinity of Native American homes and the children of these new home owners were enrolled. It is still a rapidly growing community and a new Junior High School has been approved and expansion plans have all the community excited. New Principal, new coaches, and an additional library assistant started this school year.

The Library and the Librarian are the main focus of this case study. The Librarian, Ms. Books, was cordial and helpful. She has been the librarian for the past seven years. She is the first certified librarian at this school but she stated that the previous librarian, though a lay person, was much admired in the community and had been the school librarian for over fifteen years. There was a plaque at the checkout station honoring Ms. Lastlibrarian and her dedicated service to the school and the schools library. Ms. Books had been the schools art teacher for eleven years before becoming the librarian. She noted that Ms. Lastlibrarian was a wonderful librarian and worked well with the staff and was much loved by the students. Ms. Books attended Oklahoma University and received her MLIS from that institution and moved into the library following the retirement of Ms. Lastlibrarian.

The library was well lit. Bright and colorful with much open space and well arranged study tables. The books were shelved against the walls. The room was sixty feet long and close to thirty feet wide giving approximately 1800 square feet in which to work. There were two smaller glass enclosed rooms in the center of the library. One of the rooms was Ms. Book’s office and the other room was the computer room with three computers for internet access. The west wall had a smart board. There was a room with entry on the west wall where the AV equipment is stored. The fiction is shelved on the east and the eastern half of the north wall with one extra row of shelves free standing and running parallel with the east wall. The non-fiction was shelved on the south wall west of the entry door. The South wall is a glass paneled wall and there are many colorful reading posters affixed to these glass walls and are read from the hallway.

Ms. Books’ staff is comprised of one full time clerk and one full time volunteer. The volunteer has been at the library for several years. Ms. Books introduced her staff and gave them much praise. She then gave a tour of the library and allowed the student doing the case study to set in while she presented a program to a group of third graders. While she was performing her program the library remained open and many children came in and checked out books. The students were quite but conversant with the staff as they checked out their selected books.

Ms. Books’ program for the library is exemplary in that every student in the school has her in a class presented at the library at least once a week. Her library program is essential in the class programming and integrated in that her class presentation aligns itself to the lesson plans of the specific class that is being instructed that week in each student’s class.

Information literacy standards are of the utmost importance to Ms. Books. She works with the teachers concerning which standards are being presented and utilizes their input when designing her weekly presentation. Her curricula becomes the touchstone when measuring the effectiveness of the literacy standards. Teachers throughout the school, when asked directly concerning the information literacy standards, expressed their appreciation of Ms. Books assistance in keeping them on track and aware of the standards.

Ms. Books, when asked about availability of online resources to the community said, “Our library is not available online.“ She advised me that the school has developed a home page, but this is through the Principal’s office and the library is not involved in this project. Ms. Books seems to this investigator to be bypassed by the Principal’s office on many things. The investigator has discovered a lack of communication between Ms. Books and the Principal. The Principal giving orders to Ms. Books seems to work well. Ms. Books communications to the Principal seems to be blocked. Ms. Books needs to make her voice to the Principal a little stronger.

Ms. Books has the AR lists posted. A self-motivated reading program is available. Students are encouraged to read beyond their required assignments. There are awards for students who read more than their required assignments. Students are also given the opportunity to select books that are of individual interest especially those titles that fit into students outside of class interest.

The school library is not a member of OLTN. When Ms. Books was asked about OLTN she said she knew what it was but that neither time nor resources were available for the program. As far a community based programs outside of the school setting Ms. Books once again implied that the school did not work with any outside sources. The investigator inquired if Ms. Books utilized the County Library system and she once again responded in the negative.

This investigator would give Ms. Books and her library a proficient mark in providing intellectual access to information. She has access to a complete range of tools. In fact Ms. Senior, the fourth grade teacher who was my host at the school, gave much credit to Ms. Books as being very helpful in her pursuit of her National Certification. Several teachers at this particular school have National Certification as does Ms. Books. Ms. Senior stated that Ms. Books assisted greatly in making resources available to study for the certification examination.

Ms. Senior also allowed the student doing this case study to teach a twenty minute section to her class concerning the Dewey Decimal System. This student enjoyed the project and feels that Ms. Seniors students gained some new knowledge and new insights on how to search the library. Ms. Senior was truly an integral part of this student’s experience. She is a positive influence in her class and with her fellow teachers. She made my day at her school a wonderful experience and has invited me back again anytime.

This library meets the minimum standards and may lean toward proficient in information access and delivery. The library staff meets the information needs of the school’s students and teachers. It doesn’t reach the exemplary level as this investigator didn’t see any efforts that went beyond the expected as far as research assistance. This student heard the statement, “we don’t have that book” and this student also heard, “we just don’t have any information on that subject.” There was never any suggestion from the staff members that maybe they could look for the information elsewhere. Also, the library does not offer internet availability or instruction to students under the eighth grade level.

The facility does offer physical access to information resources for learning. The facility does have staff present to assist students and teachers. There is electronic check out capabilities. Book titles are electronically accessible. What this library lacks is convenience of accessibility. It is open when school opens and closes when school is out. It can not be resourced outside the confines of its walls. Teachers cannot access the library from their classrooms. The library has a long way to go to enter the electronic age. When questioned about this situation, Ms. Books spoke toward that capability being way down the road. It seems as if Ms. Books is actually looking forward more to her retirement than she is toward future plans for the school’s library needs. This investigator is not trying to give a negative impression concerning Ms. Books’ skills or aptitude. She has done a beautiful job with the facilities at her disposal. However, it does seem that she is lacking in overall leadership when it comes to the future of this school’s library. Her wish that her Principal was more interested in the needs of the library says a lot concerning the roll she has chosen. It is up to Ms. Books to express the leadership role the Librarian should take. This is a case that we see in all levels of organizations; someone in a leadership roll becoming comfortable with the status quo and unwilling to risk security over performance.

This school is expanding its campus with the undertaking and design of a new Jr. High School to accommodate the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. What an exciting time. Ms. Books expressed a powerful interest in this project. She is very excited about the fact that the new Jr. High School will have its own library facilities and how this will free up the existing library for the lower grades. She stated that she will be in charge of both facilities and there will be a new librarian working at the new Jr. High School. She also implied the Principal is not listening to the suggestions that she has concerning this venture. This new library will have computer classrooms for the students and a new computer center that the school’s Computer Director is designing. The Computer Director is separate from the Librarian and she wishes that there was more cooperation between herself and the computer facilitator. Once again we see Ms. Books complaining more than taking an active role.

Ms. Books review procedures are weak. She tries to provide the titles on the AR list. Her weeding process is based more on damaged material than anything else. She says her budget is limited when it comes to purchasing new titles. Software is limited and she is aware that there will be a real need for software in the new library at the Jr. High School. There are at the present time only three computers available for student use and these are available to the eighth graders only. If this school’s library has a weak spot it is in the electronic information skills and the lack of preparation for future high school students. The graduating eighth graders will move on to high schools and joining ninth graders who have had at least two years computer training behind them.

In summing up this case study this investigator will hit hard at some of the weaknesses that were very obvious in this library. First and foremost this large dependant school has no Superintendent on site. As this is a dependent school district the Superintendent is the County Superintendent who supervises all dependent school districts. The Principal along with the school board makes all policy and the County Superintendent overseas funding and operation. The County Superintendent is an elected position and this causes some strange situations in these school districts. If the County Superintendent is not well versed on the newest information systems he/she may not be much support to the Principal or the Principal’s subordinates on library needs. There needs to be better communication from the State Education office to the local County Superintendents concerning the new information age and what this entails.

Ms. Books is doing an acceptable job except she is living in the past. She received her degree eight years ago and the change in computer information has progressed at an astounding rate. Her eighth grade students are more computer savvy than she is. She has not done much in way of continuing education in the information age. She has difficulty communicating with her Principal. She is excited about the new library and the new computer equipment, but she isn’t investing enough of herself into the project.

As of now her program supports the mission of the school. As the mission changes she will not be ready to lead. She is the professional and the only one in this particular school. Her volunteer helper and her paid staff person are neither one trained in the electronic information age. As of now with the program that is operating this year staffing is adequate. When the new building is constructed and the new library installed if there isn’t any new hires at the professional level the staff will be inadequate and untrained.

The program does not have the administrative support that is required even now and the future doesn’t look too hopeful. The long range plan for the new Jr. High School is lacking as far as the future of the school library is concerned. Mission goals are lacking and the program is on the brink of failure for the future. Funding questions are on the table and Ms. Books has no idea of software cost or needs.

There are no written policies or procedures. No professional guidelines of any kind. Ms. Books stated that if a patron challenges a book the Principal will have a committee read the book but the book will be put on a shelf in the office and never see the light of day with no explanation. Intellectual freedom is not supported by the administration or the community.

Overall if one was to judge the library on appearance it would pass. If one were to judge the library on working with the teachers it would pass with an A+. If one were to judge the library on the personality of the Librarian one would state that she is super nice and friendly.

Ms. Books is the perfect example of what a school librarian should be except she is not professional when it comes to establishing the library as a place to gain intellectual freedom, information for the coming age, and evaluating the needs of her students in the electronic information age. She needs continuing education and she needs to regain her original motivation. She took the library from the Stone Age to the next level but she must receive some inspiration to raise her library to the age of information.

I applaud Ms. Books for her past work but I must fault her for not staying abreast of the new policies. She needs to reevaluate her position. The school administration needs to develop a policy of creating a library that will bring the students into the electronic information age.

John Feather (2008) said, “Nevertheless, electronic or virtual libraries, in which information is provided by network access rather than physical contact with the information source itself, already exist.” Ms. Books must realize that the electronic age is not coming it is here.

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