



TODAY'S SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALIST LEADER

By Dianne C. Dees, Kristi Alexander, Rachel Besara, Robb Cambisios, Teresa Kent and Jodie Player Delgado

It is 7:00 a.m. as Elaine Thomas pulls into the faculty parking lot at Central Middle/High School. She glances around and sees no one in sight. "Ah . . . time for one more cup of coffee and a few moments to pull things together for my budget meeting with Mr. Lee," she thinks, smiling to herself. Tap. Tap. Tap. Ms. Thomas looks up to see the panic-stricken face of a sophomore boy holding a thumb drive. "Ms. Thomas, can you help me?" the terrified student asks. "I worked all night on this paper and it's due today." The principal can wait, but the student and caffeine cannot. She tells the student to meet her in the media center in five minutes and races to start the coffee maker.*

Whether it is high school, middle school, or elementary school, the library media specialist hits the ground running each day. For many, their background is the classroom, and, as media specialists, they have taken on the largest classroom in the school. No wonder *Information Power* links leadership to the school library media specialist and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards underscores that leadership.

Leadership is the ability to influence or inspire others to achieve shared goals. The media specialist's leadership is demonstrated daily via interaction with administrators, teachers, students, parent volunteers, and community partners. An active participant in curriculum reform, she or he may serve as the delivery person for new state standards. Media specialists often are leaders in promoting new technology for teacher and student use. Knowing that reading is essential to learning, they seek to balance new ways to promote reading as a pleasurable, life-long habit. Media specialists collaborate and share instructional responsibilities with fellow teachers. Leadership opportunities abound in our profession today if one is willing to "hit the ground running."

Leadership in Technology

Elaine looked at her watch. It was 9:05 a.m. She had ten minutes before Mrs. Parker brought in her sixth grade class to finish their local history TV show projects. Since the digital video cameras were charged and ready to go, she thought, "That's plenty of time to update my blog." Having finished reading a book last night that she wanted to share with her online book discussion group, she sat at her desk and logged in to her blog page.

New forms of technology such as blogs, wikis, and podcasts can provide leadership opportunities for media specialists. As the resident technology guru on campus, a media specialist can provide staff development on new technologies and model how they can be integrated into the curriculum. Advantages of blogs (short for weblog), a type of Web site that resembles a journal, are: they can be created and updated easily (no knowledge of HTML required); a variety of media including photos, sounds, video, and links can be incorporated into them; and others can participate by posting comments to the content. Free services such as (www.blogger.com) provide templates and hosting for blogs. School library media specialists might use a blog as a repository for patrons' requests and feedback. They can lead teachers on how to use a blog as a classroom Web site.

According to Wikipedia (2006), the online, interactive encyclopedia, "a wiki is a type of Web site that allows users to easily add, remove, or otherwise edit and change most available content, sometimes without the need for registration. This ease of interaction and operation makes a wiki an effective tool for collaborative writing." Wikis are useful for groups of

students or teachers who need "shared workspace" to work collaboratively on a project to create a final product. School library media specialists can take the lead in setting up wikis for teachers to collaborate with each other by subject area or grade level. Other teacher uses of wikis might be to serve as a sounding board for school- or system-wide committees like accreditation or policy development/writing teams. Students who cannot make connections with each other due to scheduling conflicts can use wikis to work collaboratively on school or club projects. Both teachers and students can utilize wikis to further reflect after meetings or classes are over.

Podcasting is a method of distributing multimedia files, such as audio programs or music videos, over the Internet for playback on mobile devices and personal computers. In short, a podcast is a self-produced radio show. Audacity (www.audacity.com) is a free software program that allows one to produce podcasts as does Apple's GarageBand. Deb Svec (2006), an innovative media specialist at Palm Beach Gardens Community High School in Florida, uses podcasts with a lunchtime reading group she started with four senior football players. Two of the young men had not passed the Florida

How the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Defines Library Media Leadership:

LEADERSHIP

Accomplished library media specialists are instructional leaders who forge greater opportunities for learners. Through consistent initiatives with teachers, administrators, and parents, they develop programs and advocate for educational opportunities for the learning community. They work in partnership with others to provide access to appropriate research and professional articles, use data identifying strengths and weaknesses of library media programs, and review best practices. Library media specialists lead in reflective practice, assessment of learning, and program evaluation to enact effective change.

They keep the learning community informed of educational trends and developments. They reinforce the importance of information literacy in daily life. Library media specialists actively participate on school and district committees. They are members of their professional associations and willingly accept the challenge of leadership at the district, state, regional, or national levels.

Accomplished library media specialists hone their administrative skills. For example, the library media specialist who realizes that a flexible schedule would improve the library media program and

increase student achievement might research and present a proposal to the principal seeking support for this change. The library media specialist who recognizes the need for both book and other resources to alleviate current weaknesses of the library media program might work to change budget allocations, seeking avenues for increased funding to facilitate the acquisition of materials and resources needed for equitable access to information.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, "Standard X: Leadership, Advocacy and Community Partnerships." NPBTS Library Media Standards, p. 43.

Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and this was a strategy to improve their reading and thinking skills. Players could listen to podcasts related to the book, *Friday Night Lights* by H.G. Bissinger, a popular book about football.

Integrating the use of podcasts on the library Web page not only showcases student work, but also demonstrates the collaboration between the school library media specialist and the classroom teacher. Such publicity is a great leadership tool and illustrates the role of the media specialist as an instructional partner. Media specialists can suggest areas for integration into the curriculum of these and other technologies, advocate for uses of technology for various learning styles and accessibility, serve as a leader in ethical use of technology, and help develop rubrics to evaluate student projects that incorporate them. These media specialists can also allow parents and administrators to be involved in the learning community.

Elaine quickly writes down her thoughts about the book on her blog. She notices that a student made a comment about her last book. He agreed with her, except he disliked the ending. He also asked if they might continue the book discussion blog over the summer. Elaine smiles as she thinks about this student's taste in books, and then looks up as Mrs. Parker's class entered the media center. The day continues...

Leadership in Reading

Later, Elaine meets with Jill Schaffer, the social studies teacher, to plan a unit on Life in Colonial America for an 11th grade class. "Ah, Elaine," says Jill, "Those two new students in my class aren't reading anywhere near grade level but won't admit it. I'm tearing my hair out about how they will be able to research this unit." Elaine probes deeper into how Jill has discovered this, and then adds her own insights from the two times she's worked with these students in the media center for another class. "Quite honestly," Elaine muses, "I have noticed what seems like pretty high-level comprehension when they've explored some Web sites they like. Possibly they are not interested in the history texts they've been reading. Let's see what happens if we give them a graphic novel that incorporates

many facets of Colonial America." Jill smiles with anticipation as she and Elaine pour over what may just ignite the spark these students need.

This situation highlights another of the media specialist's myriad of roles—reading consultant. It has been said that reading is key to success on standardized testing. A paraphrase of a common reading theory mantra goes, "Until third grade you learn to read. After that point, you read to learn" (Baumel). Media specialists can lead by understanding the reading process, how children learn to read, and by being aware of potential pitfalls in learning to read. To meet this goal, it is highly recommended to take professional development coursework in reading and to keep up with current thinking on reading instruction. For example, media specialists would be wise to read the American Association of School Librarians (2004) pamphlet, *Your School Library Media Program and No Child Left Behind*.

Media specialists can display leadership in reading through several functions. Collection development is one area where the media specialist has a major impact.

Media specialists need to plan for readers at all levels. In middle and high school, a thoughtful and astute media specialist budgets money for popular high-interest/low-level nonfiction books to help those students with lower reading levels keep reading the "cool" books while preserving their dignity. By the same token, media specialists should consistently point out to higher readers that today's picture books do not automatically equate to lower reading levels. Much of the text in current picture books is quite sophisticated and often at the same or higher reading level than popular fiction titles. Media specialists should make students and parents aware of and encourage use of other reading resources in the community, including nearby public libraries.

The elementary media specialist with high achieving readers has perhaps one of the most difficult challenges when it comes to collection development. Many high-level books are geared for

10 Easy Leadership Ideas to Help School Librarians Become Leaders on Their Campuses



- 1 Meet regularly with your principal.
- 2 Attend all faculty meetings.
- 3 Serve on curriculum and standards committees.
- 4 Present professional development for teachers and librarians.
- 5 Engage in collaboration with teachers and technology staff.
- 6 Meet with school library colleagues.
- 7 Visit other school libraries.
- 8 Link to initiatives that are implemented on your campus or in your district.
- 9 Give recognition to others for their successes.
- 10 Attend and participate in district, state, and national association meetings and conferences.

By: Nance Nassar, School Library Senior Consultant, Colorado State Library, Colorado Department of Education.

Available: (http://www.lrs.org/documents/lmcstudies/10_easy_ideas.pdf)

“Leadership does not always mean being in the front of the line; sometimes leadership is walking beside as an encourager or behind as a supporter.”

the middle and high school audience, involving subject matter that may not be appropriate for a gifted eight-year-old. Media specialists should make it a point to carefully read the reviews on books for grades five through eight. If there is still doubt about how closely the book aligns with interests or curriculum needs, the media specialist might borrow a copy from the public library or visit the local bookstore to review the book in person.

Audiovisual materials are another means to help balance out reading levels. Books on tape/CD and kits can be used to help students fully participate in class and reinforce reading skills at home. Multimedia materials are a boon to lower readers and English Language Learners (ELL). In schools with high ELL populations, having a core collection of classic children’s books in the predominant native languages of the school allows parents to read with their children at home and participate in the school community. Bilingual books at different reading levels also greatly assist with English language acquisition.

Reading promotion is an area in which media specialists often display their leadership skills. Displays, books talks, guest authors, and student reviews on the morning news are all ways

to promote good books. The media specialist might supplement this by using multiple promotions, such as Pizza Hut Book-It, Six Flags Weekly Reader, book battles, state Children’s Book Awards, and DEAR time—not just the Accelerated Reader or Reading Counts programs used in many schools. Media specialists need to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of computerized reading programs. By training teachers on the management software and setting guidelines for consistent use school-wide, the media specialist can take the lead to maximize the effectiveness of any computerized reading program. These examples only scratch the surface, of course, in how media specialists provide leadership in reading.

Leadership in Curriculum

“Hi, Elaine. Are you meeting with us during our planning period today to discuss the new curriculum changes?” asks the classroom teacher. “Yes, I am, Enrique. I have information from the last conference and training session that needs to be implemented in the new semester.”

How does the media specialist act as a leader in instruction? This is accomplished by never isolating one’s self and by knowing what is going on in

the instructional program of the school. One colleague advocates, “Always eat lunch with the teachers.” Serving as an instructional leader might mean getting out of your comfort zone as well as using your political skills in order to have a presence at the important meetings and on the influential committees in the school and district.

Another media specialist describes that one of her most rewarding leadership opportunities occurred when she was working with English teachers to integrate technology in an Applied Communications class. Together they helped students research their topics, create visual representations of their information, and make class presentations. The project was so well received and enjoyed by the students, the teachers and the media specialist decided to present together, not at a media conference, but at the Applied Communications Conference. It allowed the media specialist to break out of the “mold” and to share what school librarians and teachers working together can accomplish.

Mentoring as Leadership

Teachers and students need to feel that the library is a place for learning and help. As media specialists, we have a definite leadership role in mentoring teachers and students in the learning process. Over 1,300 media specialists across the nation now have national board certification. Many mentoring opportunities are available to media specialists as teachers in the schools seek national board certification. New teachers also appreciate a supportive media specialist who helps with articles for a college paper, or provides assistance with writing style manuals. Leadership is an active state, one in which the leader is wherever he or she is needed. Leadership does not always mean being in the front of the line; sometimes leadership



Project LEAD

Authors of this article are students in Project LEAD, an Institute for Museum and Library Services—a funded initiative at the Florida State College of Information whose goal is to develop graduate education opportunities focused on leadership for school library media specialists. Project LEAD is available as an option within the master’s degree in Library and Information Studies, as a 12-credit post-master’s certificate, and as a 30-credit post-master’s specialist degree. This completely online curriculum is accessible nationwide and internationally, and integrates the tenets of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in Library Media. For more information see: (<http://ci.fsu.edu/go/sites/projectlead>).

“Leadership opportunities abound in our profession today if one is willing to ‘hit the ground running.’”

is walking beside as an encourager or behind as a supporter. Let new teachers know you will be there for them with a welcoming lunch or breakfast in the media center the week before school starts and give each one of them a survival kit. This might include the media center handbook, instructions on databases, a collaboration planning sheet, bookmark, coffee mug, or other items.

Students also need to feel that the media specialist is on their side and that the media center is a great place to be. Media specialists, who often witness students in a different light from the traditional classroom, can serve as student advocates.

Leadership in Professional Organizations

Just as she is picking up her purse to go home, Elaine glances at her to-do list and realizes she forgot to send an email to her state representative about why the 65 percent solution should include school library media centers. “I’ll do that after dinner before I curl up with the new Library Media Connection that came in the mail today.” Just then, her cell phone rings. It’s the chair of the State Reader’s

Award committee asking how her review of the books is coming along. Elaine laughs and mentions her podcasts asking students and teachers for their opinions on the books under review. She is almost finished reading the current box, and will have her reviews in next week.

There are many opportunities for library media specialists to become leaders outside of the school campus in state and national organizations. Participation in these organizations provides opportunities to get involved in the larger media community, develop awareness of resources for all areas of the media program, and lobby for greater acknowledgement of the influence media programs have on educational standards.

There are many leadership opportunities and roles for library media specialists, and many innovative methods of helping our students learn. As long as students attend school and teachers teach, media specialists will have a leadership role in making sure curriculum needs are addressed and media centers are places of learning.

Elaine turns out the media center lights and locks the door. It was a long and busy

day, but that is how it is supposed to be. She glances at her book bag and smiles. She can’t wait to read that new mystery over the weekend. She heard it is good. On her way to her car, the same student who stopped her that morning waves and says, “See you tomorrow, Ms. Thomas.” She waves back and unlocks her car, ready to go home, relax, read, and get prepared for another crazy day tomorrow. She wouldn’t have it any other way. ■

*Elaine Thomas is a pseudonym for a composite of several media specialists as are the teachers in the article.

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Today's school librarians provide a learning environment where students are engaged in their learning and classroom teachers collaborate to enrich their curriculum. Librarians promote digital citizenship and teach students to use technology effectively and efficiently. Sharing their love of literature and lifelong learning is one of the best aspects of the school librarians' day. If this sounds right for you, join us at Murray State!

• Certified teachers - MA in Education in Library Media for Certification in Library Media. The degree is 30 credit hours and all classes are online. The GRE is not required for admission to the program. Bachelor's degree or non-certified - MA in Education in Library Media for Initial Certification. The challenge facing today's library media specialist is to design and deliver an effective library media program. Faced with the impact of technology, societal pressures, sweeping changes in American education, and varying economic conditions, today's practitioner must respond as a dynamic leader, planner, and manager. The School Library Media Specialist as Manager

The challenge facing today's library media specialist is to design and deliver an effective library media program. Faced with the impact of technology, societal pressures, sweeping changes in American education, and Good school library teachers and media specialists have extensive education and teaching experience on the issues addressed in the column, such as Web site evaluation, proper and ethical use of the wide range of print and electronic resources available to our students today, and much more. Many of us provide hours of professional development to our colleagues and local organizations on current topics in information technologies, effective integration of information literacy skills into curriculum, and critical-thinking skills. I strongly urge you to spread the word to all education administrators and leaders today. Every child today needs these skills to enter the 21st-century workforce.