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Theme Section

The Multiple Dimensions of Principal Involvement

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We know from a substantial and still-growing body of research that the principal plays a key role in the development and maintenance of quality school library media programs.¹ One of the more interesting features of this role is its multidimensionality. Principal support truly is a complex concept.

Recent research reports by Lance, Hamilton-Pennell, and Rodney (2000), Lance, Rodney, and Hamilton-Pennell (2000a, 2000b, 2001), Smith (2001), and others illustrate and emphasize this point. If we combine and examine the results of their work, a picture of principal involvement emerges that is almost kaleidoscopic. The specific patterns and interactions vary with each site, just as the patterns in a kaleidoscope change with each turn—but, also like kaleidoscopic images, they all are constructed of the same elements.

Taken together, these studies indicate that the following elements affect the quality of school library media programs and their potential to have a positive impact on student achievement.

Proportion of the budget committed to the library	The presence or absence of a full-time qualified trained librarian	The extent of librarian collaboration with teachers
Collection size	The presence or absence of an adequate support staff	The extent to which information literacy instruction is integrated into the curriculum.
Collection currency	How much time the library staff commits to teaching	The extent to which students and others use the library
Hours of operation	The extent of the librarian's involvement in leadership activities outside the library itself	

It does not take much to see that each of these is in some way under the principal's influence, if not direct control.

Collection size, collection currency, hours of operation, staff size, and even the presence of a full-time qualified librarian are all direct functions of budget allocation, and building-level budgets are predominantly con-

structed by building principals. Unless the principal perceives the commitment of staffing dollars and operating funds as an investment rather than as a cost, the likelihood of adequate funding is reduced considerably—and with it, the likelihood that the library can have a positive impact on student achievement.

But as important as money is in library operation, it is not the only measure of principal support. Equally important is the role the principal plays in creating a school environment that values and promotes student library use and adult interaction with the librarian. The extent to which the librarian has the opportunity to collaborate with other faculty members often is a function of the school schedule, which the principal controls. More important, collaboration opportunities are a direct result of the extent to which the principal encourages such behavior among faculty members. The research evidence is clear that teachers collaborate more with other teachers and with the librarian when the principal openly encourages this and structures schedules that facilitate it (Haycock, 1999; Kruse, 1996; Pounder, 1998; Smith & Scott, 1990). How often students use the library also flows from the principal's effectiveness in encouraging faculty collaboration—as well as from budget support to keep the facility open outside school hours.

Instructional integration, similarly, is tied to the principal's perceptions and policies and to the extent of collaboration between teacher and librarian. As the curriculum leader and instructional leader of the school, the principal has great power to affect the extent to which information literacy instruction is embedded in the school's curriculum and its approach to meeting the demands of state standards.

Perhaps nowhere is the principal's power to affect library media programs more apparent than in the extent to which the librarian has an opportunity to serve in a leadership capacity outside the library media center. As the school's chief operating officer, the principal structures and populates the committees, teams, and task forces that recommend changes in school policy and practice; and the principal decides who will have the opportunity to take part in activities that span school boundaries to interact with the parent group, community organizations, or business partners (Hart & Bredeson, 1996; Hoy & Miskel, 2001; Martin & Willower, 1981; Morris, Crowson, Porter-Gehie, & Hurwitz, 1984; Sergiovanni, 1995). An active and committed librarian may be eager to engage in these activities, but this will not happen unless the principal wants it to.

As with most things in life, these elements are interactive and their effects are cumulative. Not one of them—even under optimum conditions—is sufficient in itself. External leadership opportunities will not produce positive results if the library is impoverished. The most extensive collection will produce no positive results unless there is a qualified librarian and an adequate support staff to help teachers and students use it. When we think about principal involvement and support, we must think multidimensionally. This

is why it is so important that librarians develop strong working relationships with their principals and consciously explore the various dimensions of these relationships.

In this vein, four articles in this issue explore various dimensions of the principal's involvement in school library media programs. Three examine specific principals' attitudes and behaviors that affect program development and effectiveness. The fourth reverses the analytical lens and assesses why many principals have the attitudes they do.

In a sense, the content of these four works is interrelated, and perhaps interactive. The first article, by James Henri, Lyn Hay, and Dianne Oberg, reports on a seven-nation international study of the principal's role in developing and supporting school library programs. Its findings, set in a multicultural context, illuminate some school-level constants in the principal, teacher-librarian, programmatic triad.

Although the second article, by Joy McGregor, narrows our focus to a particular program element and to particular principal-librarian behaviors and interactions in a single country, its content and conclusions are congruent with those of Henri, Hay, and Oberg. The fact that the schools McGregor studied were in yet another country reinforces the conclusions reached in both articles.

The third article, by Miles Bryant, looks into another, but closely related, dimension: the processes by which many principals evaluate libraries and librarians. Its connection to the first two works is anchored in the impact of principal perceptions. Among other things, Henri and his associates found that principals and librarians share a belief that principals should increase their efforts to foster collaboration between teacher and librarian. At the same time, however, they also found that principals and librarians often differ considerably in their larger perceptions of what the principal's role is and ought to be in advocating and facilitating information-literate schools. McGregor found principals' support for flexible scheduling and collaboration between teacher and librarian was motivated by the benefits they perceive for students; but she also found that a principal's willingness to support changes in the library media program rests on his or her positive perception of the librarian as a professional. A principal's evaluation of a librarian does more than fulfill a bureaucratic requirement. It also influences how the principal sees the library and librarian in the school, and this, in turn, influences the level of support he or she is willing to extend.

The fourth article, by Gary Hartzell, in a way brings us back to the starting point by assessing some of what we know about the origins of principals' initial attitudes and perceptions regarding libraries and librarians. These mindsets are the raw material that principals bring into the principal-librarian relationship. Whether they change over time—and with change, motivate changes in the roles the principal is willing to assume in promoting

school library media—in large measure depends on how the principal and librarian interact.

As difficult as it is to overstate the importance of principal support in the development and sustenance of quality library media programs, it is no easier to overstate the importance of the principal-librarian relationship. Nothing exists apart from its context. Librarian and principal are bound in a relationship that lasts as long as the two of them hold their positions. The work of each is firmly anchored in the context of this relationship. As organizational researcher Weick (1979) has observed, the fundamental unit in every workplace enterprise is the interlocked behavior of leader and follower, boss and subordinate. The nature of these interlocked behaviors is of paramount importance, because the various ways the principal and librarian individually and collectively interpret their meaning define the level of trust they share. The resulting level of trust, in turn, influences how effectively and efficiently each is able to work and the levels of their individual satisfaction (Graen & Schiemann; 1978; Linden & Graen, 1980; Tjosvold, 1985).

Among other useful information, the articles by Henri et al. and McGregor provide important evidence that the importance of these perceptions is neither defined nor limited by geography. The international study demonstrates that their perceptions of the importance of the library and the librarian's competence led principals in Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Japan, Scotland, and South Korea to deliver certain levels and types of support. At the same time, the United States principals interviewed by McGregor decided to support flexible scheduling changes, because they saw their potential benefits much as the librarians saw them. The results of both these studies point to the importance of congruent librarian-principal perceptions in efforts to develop quality programs. And it could go without saying that effective and useful evaluation depends on shared perceptions and values among evaluators and those being evaluated (Bernardin & Beatty, 1984; Osgood, 1981). Little can be gained from evaluation if the librarian and the principal have different perceptions of what the library is about and what the librarian does. As Bryant points out, evaluations are supposed to have utility. They are supposed to guide subsequent behavior.

The articles in this issue also are important because they describe the variety of principal behavior that constitutes involvement. In the long run, the only real measure of principal involvement is his or her behavior. The antecedents of the behavior are rooted in the perceptions the principal develops in advance of being asked for support, because they predispose his or her willingness to become involved. Involvement is not a single behavior, but a complex set of behaviors that are at once sequential and simultaneous. They are sequential in that plans need to be formulated, budgets and schedules adjusted, and personnel assigned before students and teachers can avail themselves of the library's services. Evaluation must follow implementation; it cannot precede it. They are simultaneous in that visible and vocal

expressions of support, the use of persuasive tactics with both subordinates and superiors, monitoring of response and progress, and plan revisions in the light of that monitoring must go on not only throughout the implementation process, but also in the continuing operation that follows.

Principal involvement truly is multidimensional, and it is unfortunate that we cannot here to explore dimensions beyond those addressed in these four articles. All we can do in this issue is to create an iceberg situation where we can see but a small part of the whole. Still, the part we can see stimulates our interest in the rest.

Note

IA listing of research that demonstrates the range and importance of principal involvement is available at <http://www.unocoe.unomaha.edu/ghartzell/library>

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