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Introduction to the Theme Issue: Library Power Program Evaluation

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Guest Editors

This special theme issue of *School Libraries Worldwide* focuses on the evaluation of the school library program initiative, Library Power. Library Power is the ambitious initiative of the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, designed to promote the full use of the school library program in instruction. Elementary and middle/junior high schools (up to ninth grade) in the 19 United States communities that successfully competed for a Library Power grant were eligible to participate in Library Power. Each community received \$1.2 million over the three-year period of the grant. Funding for the initiative from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund was provided through community agencies known as local education funds (LEFs). These tax-exempt, nonprofit, community-based organizations work to build community support for high-quality public K-12 education. A Library Power Director, who became part of the LEF professional staff, worked directly with the school district(s) in the community and in collaboration with others, including the district's library supervisor, to improve student learning through libraries.

Library Power sought to create a national vision of public elementary and middle school library programs, to expand the instructional roles of the librarian, to encourage collaboration between the librarians and teachers, and to create partnerships in the district and with the community. These goals were an outgrowth of the vision and professional practices recommended in the US national guidelines for school library programs, *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*, published in 1988 by the American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology.

Library Power funding was used to promote the greatest possible involvement of the librarian and the library program in instruction, that is, the teaching and learning in the school. It was hoped that this involvement would benefit most especially the students. Libraries were expected to become all that they could be in the years of the grant period, equipped, for example, with up-to-date resources that matched the curriculum through involving classroom teachers in materials selection. Libraries were located in attractive, newly refurbished facilities. They were staffed by full-time librarians, who promoted the access to and use of the library with a flexible

schedule, accommodating the needs of students and teachers throughout the school day, rather than once a week as is common practice in many school libraries. In addition, the librarian collaborated with teachers in planning instructional units and in promoting resource-based learning relating to the use of a variety of resources in instruction. Librarians also participated in or led numerous professional development opportunities, many with their schools' teachers and principals, designed to promote the full use of the library in instruction. A more detailed introduction to the Library Power initiative precedes the articles featured in this issue.

This theme issue focuses on the evaluation of the Library Power initiative. An investment of almost \$50 million to promote the central instructional role of school library programs needed to be evaluated. The central questions of the evaluation were: "What difference did the Library Power Program make?" "What are the major contributions of the Library Power Program?" "What can be learned from the Library Power Program for the future?" The DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund sought answers to these questions through a contract with the School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Following four months of planning, the evaluation of Library Power began in fall 1994. Data collection continued through June 1997. During these years, more than 50 researchers, school library program experts, administrators, and other educators contributed to the interdisciplinary evaluation effort. This interdisciplinary focus was important because the Library Power program itself involved professionals in a variety of educational roles: librarians, classroom teachers, building principals, and district leaders. Researchers with a range of perspectives were able to observe and respond to the multiple roles performed in Library Power schools.

The principal investigators from the University of Wisconsin-Madison were Dianne McAfee Hopkins, who brought a background of experience and research in school library services, and Douglas Zweizig, who brought a background of public libraries, management, and evaluation. Both are professors in the School of Library and Information Studies. The central team also included Norman Webb, Senior Scientist from the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, whose work focuses on school assessments and systemic reforms, and Gary Wehlage, Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, known for his influential work on school reform initiatives. The team also benefited greatly from special consultations provided by Carol Kuhlthau, Professor, School of Communication, Information and Library Studies, Rutgers University; David Loertscher, Professor, School of Library and Information Science, San Jose State University; and Debra Wilcox Johnson of Johnson and Johnson Consulting. Professor Kuhlthau is a noted researcher of school library programs and information-seeking behavior. Professor Loertscher is a noted school library programs researcher and the creator of collection mapping, a procedure to match the library collection to the curriculum. He is

also the creator of the collaboration log form used by Library Power librarians during the evaluation. Dr. Johnson is known for her national studies of library programs and focus group research.

In addition, for three years, five additional people functioned in roles as regional coordinators and served as evaluation contact people for all the Library Power sites. Three of these coordinators brought school library backgrounds. Two of them brought backgrounds in K-12 education, school reform, and special needs.

Methodology

In our methodology, we wished to have standardized observations across the national initiative as well as specific observations that would capture the uniqueness and richness of local experiences. Because of the Fund's strong interest in and support of the evaluation, we were able to use a mixture of survey and case study approaches.

Surveys were designed for librarians, principals, and teachers in Library Power schools. Librarians responded to three years of surveys containing a number of constant questions, as well as questions that we refined as the evaluation progressed. These surveys focused on staffing, collection quality, facilities improvements, collaboration activities, and expectations for continuity beyond the project. In addition, librarians were asked to work with their teachers to create and send to the evaluators collection maps that described the current strengths of their collections and proposed directions for collection growth that closely aligned the collection to the school's curriculum. Librarians also maintained records (called logs) of each collaboration activity carried out by teachers, and sent the evaluators their top five collaboration logs along with a summary of all collaborations in the school year.

All principals in Library Power schools and a sample of teachers from those schools were surveyed in 1996 and 1997. Principals were asked about their observations of how the library was being used. Teachers offered their perspectives on how the initiative was working for them. On these surveys of librarians, principals, and teachers, a number of common questions were asked of all three groups, so that the project could be viewed from these different perspectives. In 1997, we had survey responses from 446 librarians, 417 principals, and 1,185 teachers, exceeding 75% response rates on all three surveys.

To augment the data obtained from surveys and to get a sense of how Library Power worked in a local context, multi-case sets of case studies were conducted in 8 of the 19 Library Power communities. In each of these 8 communities, we had one case study that focused on the project at the community level, looking at the work of the local education fund and at the functioning of the site team, which consisted of the director of the local education fund, the Library Power director, the district-level library super-

visor, and a central office administrator, who was usually the assistant superintendent for curriculum. The remaining case studies focused on individual Library Power schools. Because of the large number of case studies to be conducted, 8 case studies in two communities (called sites for this initiative) were conducted in the first year as a pilot. These were continued for the following two years. In the second year of the evaluation, 26 case studies were added in six additional sites. These case studies were conducted over a period of two years. In all, we conducted 34 case studies, 8 at the site level and 26 at the school level. Case study researchers were given a standard preparation for the conduct of their cases and were asked to write to an outline that would allow the examination of key themes across cases. The general pattern was for case study researchers to make two visits per year: one in the fall and another in the spring.

For six of the building-level case studies, themes were selected for special emphasis. Three case studies focused on school reforms and sought to examine the Library Power initiative as it existed in selected schools that had embraced particular school reforms. This thematic study was directed by Professor Gary Wehlage. A second set of three case studies sought to examine how library staff and resources were used to support student learning. This thematic study was directed by Professor Carol Kuhlthau.

In addition to case study researchers, for 26 of the cases documenters were recruited locally. These local educators, including former principals, teachers, librarians, and superintendents, collected local newsletters and other publications, attended events, inservices, and meetings, and clipped local newspapers to assemble material for the case study researchers. The documenters were observers on the scene throughout the year to supplement the observations of the case study researchers' two weeks of visits.

Emphases of Theme Issue Articles

We have selected aspects of the Library Power evaluation findings that we believe will be of special interest to library professionals, including school librarians, school library supervisors, and library educators. Following a summary of the Library Power program, we begin with findings related to the evaluation of primary elements of Library Power at the building level, namely, school library collections, access to the library, and collaborations between librarians and classroom teachers.

The library collection, long considered the foundation of school library programs, was found to be an important building block for improving teaching and learning. The collection affected other areas of the Library Power program. For example, it provided reasons for teachers and students to make regular use of the library and was the basis for collaborations between librarians and teachers. The strengthening of the library collection is discussed in the article, "The School Library Collection: An Essential Building Block to Teaching and Learning," by Dianne McAfee Hopkins.

Open access to the school library through flexible scheduling was one of the requirements of the Library Power initiative. Flexible scheduling made it possible for students to use the library at point of need and/or interest as individuals, in small groups, or with entire classes. It offered opportunities for instructional unit study and team teaching that resulted from collaborations between teachers and librarians. The contributions of flexible scheduling to teaching and learning are discussed in the article, "Access and Use in Library Resources in Library Power," prepared by Douglas L. Zweizig.

Collaborations are planning opportunities provided to teachers and librarians. Many of these collaborations resulted in shared responsibilities for student learning as well as the use of a variety of materials to meet different learning styles. For many Library Power schools, this was the first time that librarians had actively and directly participated in this important aspect of instructional emphasis. The nature of collaborations between librarians and teachers, including areas in which they collaborated and the benefits of those collaborations, is the focus of the article prepared by Norman Webb and Carol Doll, "Contributions of Library Power to Collaborations Between Librarians and Teachers."

Case studies were used to support survey findings and provide more in-depth information about Library Power that represented the range of communities selected for Library Power grants. A site-level case study and a building-level case study were selected as examples to provide more in-depth information from the perspective of individual grant recipients. The authors use the common formats developed for case study report uniformity. Daniel Callison was the site-level case study researcher for Lincoln, Nebraska. In "A Site Level Library Power Case Study of Lincoln, Nebraska - Educational Excellence on the Plain," Callison tells the story of the school district's strong leadership team and the district's vision and achievement of excellence in library programs through its emphasis on professional development programs (resulting from teachers' needs assessments). "A Library Power Case Study of Lakeside Elementary School, Chattanooga, Tennessee," by Dianne Oberg, is based on her building-level case study of a Library Power school. The school's accomplishments with Library Power are linked to the leadership exhibited by the school principal and the school librarian, and the motivation of the teaching staff. Tangible results of the school's emphasis include a rise in student achievement.

Throughout the Library Power initiative, the leadership of the principal and the librarian has been central. Because librarians are principal players in providing opportunities for student learning, the views of librarians about the nature of student learning are important. Carol Collier Kuhlthau discusses the evolving perceptions of Library Power librarians about student learning in her article, "Student Learning in the Library: What Librarians Say."

Library Power represents the largest private investment in school library programs in the US in more than 30 years. Its central emphasis has been on

providing student learning opportunities that make a difference in student learning. Hopkins and Zweizig conclude with a summary article that looks at Library Power through the lens of student learning opportunities in the article, "Student Learning Opportunities Summarize Library Power."

With a worldwide interest in the development of school library programs, it is especially important that *School Libraries Worldwide* examines what the findings of this US-based initiative might mean on an international level. Sigrun Klara Hannesdóttir, immediate past-president of the International Association of School Librarians, is well suited to address this topic. Implications of the Library Power program and evaluation are addressed in her article, "Library Power: An International Perspective."

As co-principal investigators for the Library Power Evaluation, we are pleased to have the opportunity that this theme issue provides. We hope that it will be helpful at K-12 school levels in the design of school library programs. We hope that it will be helpful at the higher education level in the preparation of school librarians. Most of all, we hope that the findings of the Library Power evaluation will make a positive difference in helping all students learn.

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An Introduction to the Library Power Program

Library Power is a school improvement initiative launched by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund in 1988. Total investment in the program since its inception exceeds \$45 million. Operating in approximately 700 schools and serving more than 1 million students annually, Library Power is the largest nongovernmental funding of school library services in over 30 years.

Library Power sought to improve teaching and learning in public elementary and middle schools through better and innovative uses of enhanced and up-to-date libraries. Grants from the Fund, totaling \$1.2 million over three years to each of the participating Library Power communities, were used to renovate library space; purchase new books and upgrade print and electronic collections; and provide professional development to librarians, teachers, and principals to learn how to work together to make the best use of their new libraries.

In return, each school had to commit to hiring and paying the salaries of full-time librarians, keep the library open and accessible to everyone throughout the school day, and increase spending for books, software, and educational materials.

The goals for Library Power were based on guidelines contained in *Information Power*, a 1988 publication of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT). They were:

- To create a national vision and new expectations for public elementary and middle school library programs and to encourage new and innovative uses of the library's physical and human resources;
- To create exemplary models of library media programs that are integral to the educational process;
- To strengthen the role of the librarian as a teacher, information specialist, and learning facilitator who assists teachers and students in becoming effective users of ideas and information;
- To encourage collaboration among teachers, administrators, and librarians that results in significant improvement in the teaching and learning process;
- To demonstrate the significant contributions that library programs can make to school reform and restructuring efforts;
- To encourage the creation of partnerships among leaders in school districts, public libraries, community agencies, business communities, academic institutions, and parent groups to improve and support school library programs.

Responsibility for managing individual Library Power projects was given to local education funds (LEFs)-tax-exempt, nonprofit, community-based organizations that work to build community support for high-quality public education. The LEF leadership, whether LEF directors or Library Power directors, like educators in participating districts, were dedicated, enthusiastic people committed to promoting positive change in student learning through school libraries.

Most, but not all, of the communities were in urban locations. The level of library services among the participating sites ranged from schools that had no librarians or school libraries to communities with school libraries, fulltime librarians, and district-level library media supervisors. Despite these differences, all communities had a need and desire to enhance and elevate the role of their libraries in supporting and promoting student learning.

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the American Library Association, was one of the Fund's two partner agencies assisting on Library Power. It provided technical assistance to sites, such as inservice professional development, consultations, publicity, and coordination of annual national meetings with the Fund's other partner, the Public Education Network (PEN). PEN concentrated on providing technical assistance to local education funds.

The School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin Madison conducted the national evaluation of Library Power. The evaluation involved multi-year surveys of librarians, principals, and teachers and 34 multi-year case studies conducted in eight of the 19 communities.