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School Library Impact Studies and School Library Media Programs in the United States

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Since 1993, studies in the United States and Canada have reported a positive relationship between strong school library media programs and student achievement. These studies have been seen as useful tools for promoting the need for school library media programs and full time school library media specialists in K-12 schools if the information is disseminated to the decision makers in schools, districts, and government, such as school administrators, school board members, and local and federal legislators. This study was conducted to see how the information about school library impact studies was disseminated to decisions makers and whether that dissemination process has been effective. An examination of the effect of school library impact studies, conducted in 16 states of the United States from 1993 to 2005, suggests that the information about the studies was not effectively disseminated to decision makers and thus the school library impact studies had minimal effect on decisions and legislation related to the support of school library media programs and personnel.

A Brief History of School Library Impact Studies
Various types of school library impact studies have been conducted in the United States from 1993 to the present. The purpose of the research reported here was to examine the impact of these studies on support of school library media programs and personnel; the purpose of the research was not to critique or otherwise evaluate the validity of the studies.

In 1993, Keith Curry Lance, then director of the Colorado Department of Education Library Research Service, and his colleagues released findings from a statewide study of school library media programs that would rock the school library world. The study, which became known as “the Colorado study,” employed statistical data and analysis to show the impact of school library media programs on student achievement. The results suggested a positive relationship between well-funded school library media programs and increased student achievement (Lance, Welborn, & Hamilton-Pennell, 1997). From 1993 through 2007, Lance and

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his associates a conducted other studies similar to the Colorado study in several other states in the USA including a replication of the study in Colorado. A compilation of these school library impact studies, known as “the Lance studies,” is available on the Colorado Department of Education Library Research Service web site (http://www.lrs.org/impact.php).

Other researchers also have studied the effects of school library media programs on student achievement on a statewide basis. As of January 2009, twenty states, and one Canadian province, have either completed or are in the process of completing state studies on the effects of school libraries on student achievement. Scholastic Publishing began summarizing these impact studies in 2004 under the title School Libraries Work. The 2008 third edition is available online (http://www2.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/s/slw3_2008.pdf).

In general, the Lance studies showed a positive correlation between effective school library media programs and student achievement. The Lance studies examined variables that were easily quantifiable, including the following six variables:

- **Staffing/Availability:** including the number of full-time, certified school library media specialists, support staff, and the hours of operation;
- **Professional Development/Training:** including the number of sessions taught by school library media specialists to students and to classroom faculty;
- **Collaboration/Cooperation:** including the distinction between the number of times the school library media specialist simply provided materials for classroom use and the number of times the school library media specialist worked with the classroom teacher to plan and implement a unit or lesson;
- **Availability of Electronic Data and Technology:** including links to databases and the Internet as well as the facilities for non-print materials access (number of computers in the media centers themselves or adjacent computer labs);
- **Collections and Resources:** including the currency of the materials and the number of print items directed to supporting the curriculum and serving the general reading needs of the student populations; and
- **Usage:** including the number of visitors to the library media center and circulation statistics.

The Lance studies used correlation-based research methods such as factor analysis and multiple regression to analyze the data in each state study. The studies reported that the relationship between the school library media program and student achievement could not be explained by other school or community differences including: teacher-pupil ration, teacher or student characteristics, per pupil expenditures, adult educational attainment, socio-economic differences, or racial/ethnic demography (Lance & Loertscher, 2002). The state studies served to highlight the important contributions of an effective school library media program to student achievement.

The Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL), under the direction of Ross Todd, has conducted two state studies on the impact of school library media programming, using more qualitative markers than did the Lance studies. Concerned about the No Child Left Behind Act (see Note at end of article for more information about this federal
legislation) and its effect on school library programs, Todd and his associate Carol Kuhlthau wondered where school library media programs fell in terms of accountability and school improvement plans. Their first state school library impact study (2004) was conducted in Ohio under the auspices of the Ohio Educational Library Media Association. In this study, Todd and Kuhlthau focused on three activities of the library media program:

- **Informational**: the basic infrastructure of the library media program including the availability and currency of print and non-print resources as well as the technology to access the electronic resources;
- **Transformational**: the instructional interventions of the library media specialist including the development of information literacy skills (whether within or outside of classroom context), technology literacy (the appropriate and knowledgeable use of electronic data), and reading encouragement both in terms of problem solving and recreational reading; and
- **Formational**: the use and synthesis of information so that students meet the curriculum standards.

The Ohio study examined 39 schools that had been identified as having “effective” library media programs (based on state and national guidelines) and surveyed over 13,000 students from grades 3-12 and 879 classroom teachers. The surveys for the students and classroom teachers were designed to probe the link between student achievement and the library media program in ways beyond quantitative statistics and standardized tests scores.

In the Ohio study, the students and the school faculty (including the library media specialist, classroom teachers, and administrators) were given the same survey. Forty-eight questions, based on how the library helped the students, were clustered into seven categories:

1. How helpful the school library is with getting needed information;
2. How helpful the school library is with using the information to complete school work;
3. How helpful the school library is with school work in general;
4. How helpful the school library is with using computers in the library, at school, and at home;
5. How helpful the school library is with general reading interests;
6. How helpful the school library is outside of at school; and
7. General school aspects - these relate to Academic Achievement. (Todd & Kuhlthau, 2004, pp. 2-4)

Todd and Kuhlthau found that “99.44% of the sample (13,050 students) indicated that the school library and its services, including roles of school librarians, have helped them in some way, regardless of how much, with their learning in and out of school as it relates to the 48 statements” (Todd & Kuhlthau, 2004, p. 2).

The second study was conducted by Todd in Delaware under the auspices of the Delaware Governor’s Task Force on School Libraries, the Delaware Division of Libraries, and
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the Delaware Department of Education. This study was conducted in two parts. The results of part one (a more quantitative study) were released to school library media specialists and school superintendents in February 2005. In this study, Todd found that school library media specialists were working hard to implement integrated information literacy curricula into the school curriculum but many libraries lacked the infrastructure, i.e., space, budgets, and time, necessary to run fully integrated programs. The second part of the study focused on 13 schools identified through the first study as having at least some exemplary elements in their programs. These schools, like those in the Ohio study, agreed to survey students and classroom teachers on their opinions about the library media programs. Also, as in the Ohio study, responses from the participants indicated that fully integrated programs helped students become more information literate and helped classroom teachers meet the demands of the Delaware content standards (Todd & Heinstrom, 2006).

**Impact of State School Library Impact Studies**

Despite the positive reports of these state school library impact studies, informal discussions with school library media specialists over the years have seemed to indicate that the studies had had very little impact on the integration of library media curricula into school curricula and very little impact on the legislation (local or federal) related to school library media programs and school library media specialists. To test the reality of these claims, a research study was designed to evaluate the impact of the state studies on decisions made about school library media programs and personnel.

**Research Questions and Methodology**

The research hypothesis was that, because state studies were not being disseminated or marketed to the decision makers, the results were two-fold: first, the studies were having very little impact on state decision makers; and second, the reason for this low impact was that the results of the studies had been disseminated mostly to the building level school librarian, not to the decision makers. The definition used in this research for decision makers included state legislators, school administrators, and educators of classroom teachers, administrators and school library media specialists.

To verify this hypothesis, in January through February 2006, school library leaders in each of the states where school library impact studies have been conducted were surveyed. The purposes of the survey was to ascertain whether school library leaders had noticed any changes in perceptions of school library media programs in their states and, if so, whether they attributed those changes to the state studies.

Participants in the survey were identified as leaders in school library media in their individual states by virtue of their membership in the Affiliate Assembly of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). The Affiliate Assembly is composed of two representatives from each state library media association. Typically the representatives are the president and vice-president of the state school library association. Thus the school library media specialists in the states themselves have identified these people as leaders in their states. State leaders were surveyed rather than individual building level school librarians based on the premise that the leaders should not only have a good idea of what is going on in terms of
support of school library media program and personnel across the state but also have knowledge of how the state survey was being disseminated across the state. By surveying identified leaders within each state, there was also the likelihood of a high return rate of the survey. Members of the Affiliate Assembly who fit the criteria of the survey were personally contacted during the midwinter and annual conference meetings of the American Library Association in 2006/2007 and asked to participate in the survey.

The survey was administered through the online survey program, Survey Monkey. Both representatives from each state were given the opportunity to respond to the survey; some state representatives opted to fill out only one survey, and some states forwarded the survey to other education professionals in the state who had either participated in the implementation of the state study or who had some other leadership role in the state. Although there are currently 21 states where school library impact studies have been conducted, only those whose studies were published prior to 2005 were surveyed (16 states). Because the purpose of the survey was to discern any impact of the state studies, it was important that at least one year had passed since the release of the state study results.

There was a 100% response rate to the surveys, which included 24 respondents from 16 states. The states represented and the number of respondents for each state were: Alaska (2), Colorado (1), Florida (1), Iowa (1), Indiana (1), Massachusetts (1), Michigan (1), Minnesota (2), Missouri (2), North Carolina (1), New Mexico (1), Ohio (3), Oregon (2), Pennsylvania (1), Texas (2), and Washington (2).

**The Survey Results**

The survey consisted of eight questions gathering information about the state, the nature of the school library impact study conducted in the state, and the ways in which the study was disseminated to various decision makers. Respondents were invited to elaborate on their answers at the end of the survey. The full text of the survey is included in Appendix A.

The first question asked about efforts for the dissemination of the study results. This question is reflective of the idea that it is one thing to conduct a study and a very different thing to make sure decision makers are aware of the results. Respondents were asked to answer the question in terms of how the results were disseminated to building level school library media specialists, classroom teachers, school administrators, state legislators, and faculty members in teacher, administrator and school library education programs. With respect to efforts to disseminate the study results to school library media specialists, most respondents (96%) felt that there had been strong efforts to disseminate the results to school library media specialists. The responses about dissemination efforts to other stakeholders were not as positive. Only 22% felt there were efforts to disseminate the results to classroom teachers, 17% to administrators, and 17% to legislators. In terms of teacher education programs, respondents seemed to feel there were stronger efforts to get the study results to the faculty of pre-service teachers (39%), administrators (35%), and school library media specialists (81%). The survey results do not reveal if the faculty of those programs actually passed on information to their students.

From these results, one can see that most of the efforts to disseminate the results of the state studies focused on informing building level school library media specialists about the
results of the state studies. This supports the hypothesis of this inquiry that there has been little focus on disseminating the study results to decision makers, resulting in little overall impact on the integration of school library media programs into the school curriculum. As commented by three of the respondents:

I have seen little change in the way classroom teachers and administrators view library media—most tragic I believe is that teacher and administrative licensure programs at the university level have not integrated “any” knowledge of the importance of SLM and school programs and student achievement.

As much as I would like to say the study had a huge impact, I’m afraid it probably didn’t - and we particularly see that in the recent proposals for cuts in school districts across the state. With the budget crises we face in education, the media center has become a prime candidate for cuts from elementary media centers on through high school.

Here’s what bothers me about the study: The [state name deleted] Department of Education has not used the study at all to advance [state name deleted] school libraries. The State Board of Education seems to ignore the study and won’t even take the time to engage in a dialogue about it … [identifying information deleted]… To me that means nothing will impact this state until the Department of Education and the State Board of Education make an effort to understand the role of school libraries today. Our efforts at this point are all grassroots, back at the local district level with librarians and local boards of education.

Generally, the respondents reported that the results of the state studies have enabled school library media specialists to increase their advocacy efforts; however, there does not appear to be an overall effect on teacher or principal behavior toward school library media programs, nor was there any reported evidence of changes in teacher education programs or principal education programs to incorporate information about school library media programs into those education curricula.

**Implications of the Study**

State school library studies can yield important information about the impact of school library media programs on student achievement. However, the results of this study help to illustrate that, without concerted efforts to communicate the state study results to important stakeholders, the studies do little more than to state the obvious to building level practitioners. As mentioned above, those surveyed believed that the state studies provided support for advocacy efforts at the building level but that there appeared to have been very little impact on decisions made at the district or state level.

School library media specialists in the USA can read article after article about how to “train” the administrator (see, for example, Hartzell, 2002; Harvey, 2008; Oberg, 2006), but do administrators read, or have ready access to, similar articles? It does not appear so. Articles about “training” school library media specialists or about the vitality of school library media programs (see, for example, Kaplan, 2007; Long, 2009; Valenza, 2005/6) that are published in
journals read by decision makers such as school administrators and legislators are comparatively rare. Similarly, there are few library and information faculty who work in collaboration with schools of education to introduce pre-service classroom teachers to the elements of school library media programs and to how the school library media specialist can collaborate with classroom teachers to enhance the quality of school curricula.

As leaders in school library media, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that decision makers are better informed about the results of these state studies on the impact of school libraries. It is not enough to post a study on a web site (not even if it is a state department of education web site). We must make full effort to inform legislators, school board members, and teacher/administrator educators about these studies, to go beyond the walls of the school building to ensure that decision makers understand the impact of the school library media program. The study indicated that the systematic disseminating of information about these state school library impact studies to important decision makers has not been done. We must call upon our associations to be more proactive about the dissemination of the information and we must take on some of this responsibility ourselves.

Note
The No Child Left Behind Act is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2001. The Act requires all schools to be accountable for the performance of each student on standardized tests given to students at various times during their elementary and secondary education (US grade levels K-12). The Act ties certain federal funding to the results of these tests. The implications of this legislation, some argue, is that teachers will teach to the state test and therefore will not make full use of other educational resources such as art, music, physical education, and library programs. A full description of the legislation can be found on the United States Department of Education web site at: http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html.

References
Todd, R., & Kuhlthau, C. (2004). *Student learning through Ohio school libraries: Background, methodology and report of findings*. Columbus, OH: OELMA. Additional online reports on this research study may be found at [http://www.oelma.org/OhResearchFindings.htm](http://www.oelma.org/OhResearchFindings.htm)


**Author Note**

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**Appendix A**

**Survey on the Impact of School Library State Studies**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. The purpose of this survey is to get a general feel for the impact of state school library media studies on the school library media program. As a leader in your state, you are being asked to give your opinions on this topic to the best of your knowledge. The answers you provide here are confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

1. Please give the state in which you are working and the person and organization (if applicable) responsible for the study. Example: Oregon, Lance et al., OEMA.

2. In which year was your state study conducted?

3. Please rate the following statements on efforts of the responsible organization to disseminate information about the results of the state study.

| Efforts were made to disseminate the information to all school library media specialists in the state. | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Don’t know |
| Efforts were made to disseminate the information to all classroom teachers in the state. | | | |
| Efforts were made to disseminate the information to all school administrators in the state. | | | |
| Efforts were made to disseminate the information to all legislators in the state. | | | |
| Efforts were made to disseminate the information to all teacher education programs in the state. | | | |
| Efforts were made to disseminate the information to all administrator education programs in the state. | | | |
| Efforts were made to disseminate the information to all school library education programs in the state. | | | |
4. Please select the answer that best describes the impact you feel the state study had on school library media programs. (Select one only.)
   - Completely changed the way library media programs were perceived.
   - Made it easier to implement advocacy activities.
   - Gave school library media specialists the tools needed to start collaborating with the classroom teachers.
   - Had little impact one way or the other.
   - Other (please specify)

5. Please select the statement that best reflects the impact of the study on classroom teachers. (Select one only.)
   - Many classroom teachers are now interested in collaborating with school library media specialists.
   - Some classroom teachers are now interested in collaborating with school library media specialists.
   - It has not seemed to change the willingness of classroom teachers to collaborate with school library media specialists.
   - Other (please specify)

6. Please select the statement that best reflects the impact the study has had on administrative support of school library media programs. (Select one only.)
   - Administrators were already supportive of integrated school library media programming.
   - Administrators began to show interest in integrating the school library media program into the general school curriculum.
   - The study had no impact on school administrators.
   - I do not think the administrators even know about the study.
   - Other (please specify)

7. To the best of your knowledge, do you feel the state study has any impact on teacher education in your state?
   - Yes, new teachers are now ready to collaborate with school library media specialists.
   - No, I don't think teacher education has changed in my state.
   - I do not feel I have enough knowledge about teacher education in my state to answer this question.
   - Other (please specify)

8. To the best of your knowledge, do you think the state study has had any impact on administrator education in your state?
   - Yes, I expect new administrators now understand the instructional role of the school library media specialist.
   - No, I don't think the study has had any affect on administrator education.
   - I do not feel I have enough knowledge about administrator education to answer this question.
   - Other (please specify)

9. If you want to expand on some of your answers or have other statements to make about the impact of the state study, please do so here. Please feel free to use the back of this form.

10. If you would like to find out the results of the study, please enter your name and email address here. Thank you for participating in this study!