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The Principal's Perceptions of School Libraries and Teacher-Librarians

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There is no question that principal support is vital to the establishment and maintenance of a quality library media program. The problem is that support flows from trust, and trust flows from understanding. Many principals do not understand what teacher-librarians really do, nor do they appreciate the potential the library media program has for contributing to student and faculty achievement. Principals' perceptions of school libraries and teacher-librarians have been shaped by four interactive forces. The first is their own experiences in school libraries as children, in which they perceived the library as peripheral to the classroom. The second is the effect of their professional training, in which the library's role in curriculum and instruction was conspicuously absent. The third is the nature of the teacher-librarian's work, which is to enable and empower others. The fourth is the low profile teacher-librarians and school libraries have in the professional literature read by teachers and administrators, which prevents them from updating their sense of what the library really is and can do. The cumulative result is that administrators have only a limited and inaccurate understanding of libraries and teacher-librarians. The only way to change principal perceptions is to assault them directly, repeatedly, and from a multiplicity of directions. Reshaping perceptions takes time and effort and commitment. In the meantime, these erroneous perceptions will continue to guide most principals' relationships with school library media specialists.

Introduction

Administrators face difficult challenges in their work and in their workplace relationships. Although we all value trust, letting others represent the school to the community, letting them take the lead in curriculum revision, allowing them to structure and administer budgets, hire or fire, alter procedures and timelines, or actually decide policy carries a potential for personal professional damage or loss than is greater than any gain to be made. It is little wonder that many principals appear distrustful of their staffs.

To trust another person at work requires that we perceive him or her as competent, committed, and trustworthy (Gabarro, 1978, 1990). To do this, we really need to understand the other person, his or her job, and what he or she does to contribute to the organization's good. Only when we are armed with this knowledge can we accurately determine our role in relation to that other person and how our role interacts with his or hers. Acquiring this understanding of school library media specialists can be difficult for a school principal.

We rarely see ourselves as others see us. From the librarian's perspective, media centers and media specialists are inarguably valuable to students, teachers, and administrators, clearly essential to student achievement, and central to the school's mission. To many principals, however, their value is less obvious and less certain. The purpose of this article is to describe how the typical principal perceives school library media specialists and their role in the school.

The Principal's Perceptions

Research tells us that many principals, perhaps most, have a limited understanding of how school library programs function and how they can and do contribute to school quality (Dorrell & Lawson, 1995; Hambleton & Wilkinson, 2001; Pennock, 1988; Taylor & Bryant, 1996; Veltze, 1992; Wilson & Blake, 1993). With their perceptions rooted in stereotypical images, many principals still see media centers as libraries and libraries as warehouses of materials to be managed and checked out to students (Buchanan, 1982; Dorrell & Lawson, 1995; Swanson, 1988). They see the people who run libraries as librarians and librarians as stereotypically fussy, difficult to get along with, more interested in things than in people, and isolated from the staff (Cavill, 1987; Herrin, Pointon, & Russell, 1988; Land, 1988; Silver, 1988). These principals expect librarians to find for them the information they want when they want it, to assist teachers when they ask for assistance, and to help students find the materials they need to complete the assignments their teachers give them.

Although principals know that librarians teach research skills, they usually do not perceive them as teachers in the same sense as their colleagues in the classroom, and they clearly do not see librarians in the *Information Power* (American Library Association and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology [ALA & AECT], 1988, 1998) roles of instructional partner, curriculum consultant, staff developer, and program advisor (Buchanan, 1982; Campbell, 1991; Cruzeiro, 1991; Dorrell & Lawson, 1995; Edwards, 1989, Gast, 1984, Glaze, 1992; Grant, 1988; Hamilton, 1983; Naylor & Jenkins, 1988; Pfeiffer & Bennett, 1988; Scott, 1987; Schon, Helmstadter, & Robinson, 1991; Swanson, 1988). An Arizona study (Schon et al., 1991), for example, indicated that fewer than 7% of principals in that state believed that school library media specialists should exercise leadership roles in the educational community. Studies in other states have found that principals do not see providing instructional design assistance as an important part of the librarian's job (Pfeiffer & Bennett, 1988), and these principals give their highest duty rankings to materials selection, library management, and reference and research help for students (Dorrell & Lawson, 1995).

Perhaps the best evidence that many principals do not clearly understand library media programs is found in how they evaluate school library media specialists. Many specialists across the country are never evaluated at all, and

when they are, the evaluations are frequently less than comprehensive. It is not uncommon for principals to completely ignore some of the activities librarians regularly perform. Consulting with teachers on instructional approaches is a good example. Although many librarians regularly work in unit and lesson planning with teachers, consultation is among the least often evaluated specialist activities (Taylor & Bryant, 1996).

It is not at all uncommon for principals to use the same form and format for media specialist evaluations that they use for teacher evaluations (Dorrell & Lawson, 1995; Taylor & Bryant, 1996). It is not difficult to see why. Principals understand teachers and teaching, having worked in classrooms themselves, but they are largely unfamiliar with and misunderstand what it takes to run a library. One study, for example, found that principals think media specialists spend 20% less time on instruction than the media specialists reported spending (Edwards, 1989). It does not matter so much whether this means that principals are uninformed or that principals and media specialists differently define *instruction.* Just the existence of the response disparity reveals a gap in understanding. More important, even if principals and librarians had perfectly congruent perceptions of instruction, evaluating media specialists only on the teaching dimension of the job feeds misunderstanding, because it does not draw attention to the wider spectrum of services and support they can offer.

This is a key point. Research in psychology and social psychology has established that the more difficult it is to make a judgment—for example, when there is a shortage of time or when information is unfamiliar and complex, which is exactly what principals face in evaluating school library media specialists—the more likely people are to rely on stereotypes (Bodenhausen & Lichtenstein, 1987; Freund, Kruglanski, & Shpitzajzen, 1985; Kruglanski & Freund, 1983). This helps to explain why many principals give higher importance rankings to the presence and role of school libraries in the abstract than they do to the importance of the libraries in their own schools (Dorrell & Lawson, 1995). It also helps make sense of Berkowitz's (1993) observation that whereas others involved in instruction in the school are assumed to be valuable and need only to justify their budgets, librarians often are called on to justify why they should even have a budget.

All this points up that too few principals really seem to understand the value of the media center and specialist. And it signals that principals and school library media specialists do not often enjoy the kind of solid working relationship that provides mutual benefit to all parties concerned and maximizes the contributions of each to the organization as a whole. Solid relationships are based on understanding each other's roles and functions and trusting in each other's competence, expertise, dedication, and honesty (Shaw, 1997; Zand, 1997). The question is why more principals do not see these characteristics in the library media specialists with whom they work.

Why Principals Have Such Perceptions

There are probably as many answers as there are principals, but at least two interrelated factors that shape the most common perceptions can be identified: (a) the occupational invisibility of most school library media specialists, and (b) the occupational socialization of school principals.

Occupational Invisibility

The first and fundamental factor that shapes principal perceptions of media specialists is the invisibility factor. Because of their own experience and the focus of their jobs, principals, like most educators, and certainly like members of the general public, tend to define schools by classroom teaching and learning measures. Conceptualizing schools this way puts teachers and administrators at the core: administrators along with teachers because they hire and supervise the teachers. Librarians are perceived as staff members who assist those who foster student achievement, and not as line performers directly responsible for student—and certainly not for teacher or administrator— progress and success. This perception often makes it difficult for others, both inside and outside education, to see the depth, breadth, and importance of what media specialists contribute, or should be contributing, to schools and schooling.

Ironically, the nature of school library media work tends to help sustain the perception. First, because librarians are engaged in empowering others, their contributions ultimately are absorbed into a teacher's lesson or a student's project. Second, many media specialists serve as the only librarian in a school and because their schedules often require them to be on duty while other members of the teaching staff are on break or at lunch. The result is a sort of professional isolation. Last, because library media work represents a specialization, media specialists tend to write for each other, so it is not surprising to find that they have virtually no presence in the journals other educators read or on the program schedules of the conferences they attend. Let us look a little closer at the effect produced by each of these conditions.

The Nature of the Media Specialist's Work

Library media specialists deliver services that empower others to be successful in their jobs, and their contributions get swallowed up in the activities of these people. Teachers and students take what media specialists give them and fold it into their own thinking patterns, work products, and performances. The integration is so complete that it is difficult to distinguish the extent of the specialist's contribution in the finished work. Ultimately, the student sees the research project, examination success, or performance quality as something he or she put together as an individual. Teachers empowered by library media materials and assistance ultimately see as their own the teaching act in which they employed the specialist's contributions.

Most teachers view librarians more as support resources than as colleagues, let alone partners (Buchanan, 1982; Pfister, 1980). Certainly there are those who have learned the value of media centers and media specialists, but the research shows that real specialist-teacher partnerships exist only for a minority (Bell & Totten, 1992; Campbell, 1991; Getz, 1992; Haycock, 1995).

The absorbability of library media work is one of the most powerful forces clouding principals' vision of library services. A principal can recognize a successful teacher, but it is difficult to assess how much of that success might be a result of the media specialist's ideas, resources, services, and support. No matter how significant those contributions might be to the instructional program, they most probably are overshadowed by the public success of the teachers and administrators who are perceived as responsible for individual and collective student accomplishments and for the programs of the school as a whole.

Principals' inability to see these contributions sometimes causes them to withhold recognition and makes them more ready to interfere with library operation when pursuing other goals. The library and its staff are often early casualties in budget cuts, in scheduling changes, and in the assignment of extra duties. There is irony in this, and sometimes tragedy. In rightly doing everything possible to protect the classroom in tight financial times, principals may support cuts in library services, and in doing so unwittingly cut away one of the essentials of classroom quality.

Isolation and Scheduling.

Invisibility is compounded by isolation and scheduling. There usually is only one librarian in a school, and he or she is left without the strength found in numbers. This isolation can be intensified by school schedules and the patterns of library operations. Teachers and students most often have lunch and other breaks in their days at the same times. Because students and employees frequently use these times to go to the media center for what they need, many media specialists are required to be at their duty stations to serve them. This keeps them from opportunities to build relationships systematically with teachers and administrators—even, in many instances, simply to become visible by sharing lunch or a cup of coffee in the faculty cafeteria and to talk about what they do during the day.

A Low Literature Profile

The third contributor to media specialist invisibility flows from how media specialists disseminate information about themselves, their programs, and their contributions. Like other educators, they publish and present. The content of their work is wonderful: it just is not taken in by principals.

School library media specialists impressively write and present for each other. Worthwhile international, national, regional, and local school library media publications are marvelous resources filled with articles that per-

suasively argue the importance of school libraries. Rich with wonderful ideas for practice, they offer suggestions on all kinds of ways media specialists might improve their operational efficiency and effectiveness and enhance the positions of their media centers—and themselves—in their schools.

The same can be said of the presentations librarians make at school library media conferences. Regional, state, national, and international conferences offer wonderful sessions on what school libraries can and ought to be, what the future holds, how terrible problems have been overcome, the latest research on the positive effects of library media support on students and teachers, and descriptions of model programs from all over the country, if not the world.

The problem is that principals almost never see these journals or hear these presentations. Few are regularly exposed to information about the myriad ways school library media specialists can contribute to improving curriculum and instruction, public relations, staff development, and a variety of other essential school activities. Principals read administrative journals and attend administrative conferences. They do not read library media publications and they do not attend library media conferences.

Some principals do appear at library media conferences when invited by media specialists from their schools. But their attendance is usually short-lived. They will come for an awards ceremony, a luncheon, perhaps to hear a keynote address, but they do not usually attend the break-out sessions where they would be exposed to the realities of library media contribution. They really have no great motivation to attend such sessions. They have not been led to think about library media and media specialists in that way. Principals in their field, like media specialists in theirs, stay attuned to problems and possibilities through their own journals and meetings—and library media and media specialists have been conspicuously absent from these information sources.

A powerful example is found in the history of the first edition of *Information Power* (ALA & AECT, 1988). It is instructive because it shows both the gap in library media specialist-principal communication and demonstrates how the failure of that communication makes more difficult the fulfillment of a new vision of expanded library media services.

Most school principals paid little attention to *Information Power* (ALA & AECT, 1988) when it appeared because few had it forcefully presented to them. Its exposure is typical of what school principals receive regarding the contribution potential of libraries and librarians. Anyone can test this assertion by perusing any issues of the following publications looking for any articles that explain the role, function, contribution, or potential of the school library media center and media specialist to a school administrator: *The American School Board Journal, Principal, The Elementary School Journal, The High School Journal, the NASSP Schools in the Middle, the NASSP High School*

Magazine, the NASSP Bulletin, The School Administrator, Educational Leadership, Phi Delta Kappan, and *Clearing House.*

This list is not comprehensive, but it is representative of what is out there, and even a cursory examination reveals how few pieces they carry that directly address school libraries and librarians. A good number of articles may deal with technology, with reading, or with varying definitions of literacy, but few, if any, are presented in connection with library media programs.

It is similarly illuminating to make the same search for school library-related presentations at administrators' conferences and conventions. A short review of the program catalogue from the most recent annual meeting of the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), or the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) will reveal an almost complete absence of media center presentations, workshops, speeches, or poster sessions.

Finally, a look at the presentation schedule for the most recent meeting of the American Educational Research Association will complete the picture. Even in this time when administrators are paying more attention to educational research, they are not exposed to much regarding school library media.

Occupational Socialization

First impressions stay with us unless they are powerfully countered (Good, 1998). Because the material that would help them better understand library media does not appear in their journals or conferences, principals have no steady stream of information coming at them to counter the impressions they developed as students, as teachers, and as aspiring and practicing administrators.

Occupational socialization research demonstrates that each of us goes through at least three stages as we move toward our career positions. The first is termed *anticipatory socialization,* the second is called the *encounter period,* and the third is the *accommodation period* (Feldman, 1976; Fisher, 1986). The anticipatory stage is where we develop impressions, expectations, and anticipations of what it is like to be a member of a certain profession. The encounter stage is where our expectations encounter the reality of the job, and the accommodation period is where we reconcile our anticipated experience with our real experience and decide whether to continue in the field.

The anticipatory stage involves the conscious and unconscious gathering of facts and impressions regarding (a) what a particular job is like, (b) what we personally think we would be like in that job, and (c) the environment in which that job is performed (Fisher, 1986; Louis, 1980). Until we target exactly the position we want and begin to envisage ourselves in it, the gathering of impressions is largely eclectic, giving more attention to what

various jobs and their environments are like than to what we might be like in one of them

Experience as K-12 Students

Educators tend to have had long, rich periods of anticipatory socialization: longer and usually richer than those of any other professionals. One may not become interested in architecture or medicine or law or some aspect of business until high school or college. But we all begin to gather impressions about the work and work lives of teachers, administrators, and other educators—including school library media specialists—with our first day of schooling, somewhere around age 5. Whether we go on to become a teacher, media specialist, or principal, the impressions of each and a sense of how each is connected to, and interacts with, each of the others stays with us.

Most students go through their elementary, middle, and high school experiences gathering teacher and media specialist impressions that tell them librarians are different from teachers, do qualitatively different work in a unique specified location, and manage a facility markedly different from a classroom.

These impressions were powerfully communicated to the generation of principals now administering our schools. The average age of school principals today hovers around 49, and nearly 40% are over age 50 (Educational Research Service, NAESP, & NASSP, 1998; Feistritzer, 1988; National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1996). Most were themselves K-12 students in the late 1950s and through the 1960s, before most school libraries became media centers, and certainly before most school librarians reached beyond their traditional roles.

Outside of school, these impressions were reinforced in the stage, film, and other media images of their time. Marian the librarian in *The Music Man* and the alternative destiny of Mary in *It's a Wonderful Life* are good examples. Marian was an "old maid" who loved her books and wanted a quiet library, and she was only pulled from that life by a flamboyant con man. In *It's a Wonderful Life*, James Stewart's character was granted his wish to see the world as it would have been had he never been born. In that alternate life, without him to rescue her, the bright and beautiful woman who would have become his wife found her dark and lonely fate was to become a librarian. There was a message there: librarianship was a job from which one should be rescued.

These were the images of libraries and librarians, real and celluloid, that these people took to college with them, and they have not yet altogether disappeared. They can still be seen in some of the representations of librarians in many of today's television shows and commercials. A few years ago, the Saturn automobile company aired a commercial aimed at impressing viewers with a new model's quiet ride. To do this, they showed a gray-haired woman riding in the back seat while two engineers rode in front.

The voice-over told us that the car was incredibly quiet and that it passed the most stringent of tests: "Margaret's." "Margaret knows quiet," he said, "Margaret's a librarian."

Teacher Training

One would hope that such misleading impressions of school librarians would have been corrected in the course of teacher training, the second step in the anticipatory socialization of school principals. Unfortunately, it did not happen, partly because the images were not completely inaccurate in the late 1950s and the 1960s and partly because the people training teachers and administrators then, as now, had no alternative visions to offer their students. In fact, the greater likelihood was that the perception of librarians as different from teachers was more reinforced than modified. It was that basic notion that today's administrators carried through teaching and then into the administrative office because, by law in most states, school principals must have been teachers at one time.

Even now, few teacher training programs contain any systematic instruction in how the library media center and media specialists might improve instruction, serve in staff development projects, assist with special student populations, or provide administrative support. There is some glimmer of hope that this is changing. Wisconsin provides an encouraging exception. Administrative rule PI 4.09(12) requires that teaching license candidates receive instruction about school library media programs and become adept at using a variety of resources and technologies. But, in the main, the predominant model in schooling is still anchored in the same basic notion it has always been: one adult in one room working with one group of students for one period of time (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Greer & Short, 1993; Lieberman, 1985; Shedd & Bacharach, 1991; Shulman, 1989). In elementary schools, the span may cover the whole day; in secondary schools, the increment is the length of the period. Even some of the supposed innovations in school organization today—secondary school block scheduling and state-mandated class-size reduction, for example—do not alter the basic model. They just change the size of one or more of its elements.

Teacher training emphasizes the individual classroom interactions between teacher and student. Teachers are predominantly trained as independent operators simultaneously in charge of, and responsible for, what goes on in their classrooms (Friend & Cook, 1992). They usually are not trained in the collaborative and consultative models found in law, medicine, and the other professions. The result is that aspiring teachers are not provided with any model or expectation that school library media specialists should be regarded as partners in curriculum and instruction.

Teaching Experience

The third stage in a principal's anticipatory socialization is the experience of teaching. But again, as future principals entered their teaching careers in the 1960s and 1970s, as now, they most often encountered little to change their accumulated impressions of the school library media specialist's role.

Continuing what they observed as K-12 students and learned in teacher training, new teachers find that the focus in teaching is individual. The structure of schools isolates each teaching employee. It is not just the evaluation of students that is rooted in individual performance. We may test students at selected grade levels to see how well they write, how well they can handle mathematics, and how well they understand scientific concepts, but there is no collective evaluation of the teachers who taught them the elements of these subjects and skills over the years (Duffy, 1995, 1997). Each teacher is evaluated individually on an annual, biannual, or triennial basis.

There is a basic cultural rule that only one teacher will supervise a given student in a given pursuit at a given time (Packard, Charters, & Duckworth with Jovich, 1978). Because of the emphasis on individual teaching, teachers are often more competitive than cooperative (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Lortie, 1975; McNeil, 1988; Packard et al., 1978). Although it is routine to seek second opinions, employ specialists, or work from a team concept in other professions, to admit a need for help with a problem in teaching is to admit to a personal weakness or incompetence (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sarason, 1982).

To support these norms, teaching long ago developed an egalitarian culture (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Rosenholtz, 1989; Troen & Boles, 1993). With few exceptions, there are no formal ranks among teachers. Except in the few schools with some kind of meaningful differentiated staffing, promotion is possible only by leaving teaching. In most schools, two teachers of the same grade or subject—one a 65-year-old teacher with more than 40 years experience and the other a 22- or 23-year-old first-year teacher—perform the same duties. Salary schedules do not differentiate on assignment difficulty or performance quality of performance (Burden, 1985; Jacobson, 1988; Murnane, 1987; Stern, 1986). To sustain these values and practices, the teaching culture in most schools forbids one teacher openly criticizing another and discourages showing each other how to better do things. The ideal colleague is the person willing to offer help, but who will not criticize, evaluate, or give even informal direction. As one researcher (Newberry, 1977) has pointed out, the only really acceptable way one teacher has to tell another to do something differently is to pass along the nonthreatening information that alternative methods exist and are being used in other schools, preferably at some great distance from this one.

The isolation of classrooms provides teachers with a great deal of autonomy in the completion of their work. Teachers decide on the nature and the flow of events in their classrooms and they value that control (Burden, 1985;

Jacobson, 1988; Murnane, 1987; Stern, 1986). The thought of having to negotiate and share this control threatens their autonomy, and they resist. By definition, the involved school library media specialist described and encouraged in *Information Power* (ALA & AECT, 1988, 1998) violates these egalitarian norms. The *Information Power* media specialist is asked to provide leadership rather than just support not only by teaching students, but by teaching teachers. This conception of a school librarian's role and behavior is not compatible with the role and behavior most of this generation understands. Librarians who played the kinds of roles *Information Power* outlines for media specialists were rarely seen in schools between the 1950s and the 1970s. It is difficult to find evidence that the *Information Power* notion of a library media specialist is widespread among educators today. Many teachers still see specialist attempts to behave as a staff developer, curriculum advisor, or instructional consultant as academic incursions, and interpret them as encroachments on teacher autonomy by an arrogant peer.

Administrative Training

The last phase of anticipatory socialization for school principals is their work in a university administrator-training program. This stage of socialization is of particular importance (a) because aspiring principals there have their attention specifically focused on that particular job, (b) because the content of this socialization period is concentrated on administration, and (c) because it is the last anticipatory period; the next step is into the office and into the encounter stage of occupational socialization where expectations meet reality.

Robert Louis Stevenson once remarked that the cruelest lies are often told in silence. In effect, this is the impact of administrator training programs. Any review of administrator training curricula, and the textbooks used in those programs, reveals a stunning lack of attention to the library media center and its potential (Veltze, 1992; Wilson & Blake, 1993). The net result is that administrative training does little or nothing to enhance principals' awareness, let alone understanding, of the library media center and the media specialist. Aspiring principals are not made aware of the media center's potential and do not come to see themselves as important players in maximizing the specialist's contributions to school quality.

It is not too difficult to see why this happens. Most professors of educational administration are themselves former school administrators. Their perceptions of school library media programs and media specialists were shaped by the same factors shaping those of the next generation of administrators. They simply bring those perceptions with them to the university setting, and nothing there challenges them. Veltze's (1992) research shows the effect. Although 91% of the professors of administration across the country who responded to her survey thought that media specialists could be of more help to teachers if teachers and specialists had more time to plan

together, 90% did not see the principal as an important influence in teacher-librarian collaboration—a notion that runs counter to the lessons of research (Charter, 1982, Corr, 1979, LaRocque & Oberg, 1991; Oberg 1995, 1997; Oberg, Hay & Henri, 2001; Wilson & Lyders, 2001).

When administrative preparation programs do address library media programs, the tendency is to focus on potential problems rather than on demonstrated or possible benefits. This leaves administrative students with the impression that school libraries are legal time bombs rather than the impression that the library and librarian can make significant contributions to a new principal's success. It fosters what might be called a favorable view of negativity. The "good" is not defined by a positive act; it is defined by the absence of a negative one. The "good" librarian is one who does not get the principal into trouble. This can have a chilling effect on any new principal's willingness to invest great trust in a school librarian—and, once in office, the demands of the principalship preclude much chance of an administrator learning the truth about libraries and librarians on the job. Without exposure to the merits of library media programs during their training, principals in the field generally have neither the inclination nor the time to learn about them on their own. Media specialists who conform to principals' impressions of what they should be, and who stay out of legal trouble, are likely to remain unnoticed and undervalued.

What Does This Mean to Library Media Specialists?

What does it matter if the principal's perceptions of the librarian and the library media center are erroneous? The answer is that it can matter a lot, and on multiple levels. A price is paid at each level, and the cumulative cost can be staggering.

Personal Professional Level

The first and most immediate level on which erroneous principal perceptions can matter is to the librarian as a person and professional. We all share the desire to achieve, to have recognition, and to have an impact in our work lives. These are the pillars of workplace psychological health. People need to feel that the work they do counts for something. Job satisfaction and productivity both have ties to the feeling that we make a difference in both the people and events in our work lives (Grimes, 1978; Kipnis, 1976; Parks, 1985; White, 1959). If principals do not understand what library media centers are about and what media specialists can do in varying realms of school activity, they are not likely to provide opportunities for media specialists to make a difference. If principals do not support, encourage, and facilitate meaningful interactions and collaboration between media specialists and teachers because they do not grasp their value, then media specialists' opportunities to make a real difference at work are reduced.

Having an impact at work is difficult enough in a bureaucracy, but to be isolated and misunderstood increases the challenge. Bureaucratic organizations are built on the concept of interlocking dependencies. No one is provided with everything he or she needs to be able to the assigned job. Even highly autonomous positions do not operate in a vacuum. Each position is structurally tied to other parts of the organization and to the people who populate them. Whenever one is dependent on others for what is needed to succeed, the ability to control one's own destiny is reduced. Having a visible presence and a positive working relationship with the powerholders in the work setting help to reduce vulnerability.

At the same time, schools are changing. As much as the fundamental bureaucratic and operational structure remains unaltered, many internal components are being reconfigured. This results in changed approaches—such as have come with the advent of technology—and changed relationships, such as have emerged in site-based management, the middle school concept, and teacher empowerment programs. Change inherently involves conflict (Evans, 1996; Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 1997). There are winners and losers. Being perceived as other than central to the school's mission invites problems and increases vulnerability. Examples of the resulting inattention and undervaluing are not difficult to find. The library media centers in many schools are operated by people not trained in the field. School library media specialists in many places are being pushed into becoming technology coordinators, because principals can see the value of technology, but they cannot see the value of what they perceive as the media specialist's current role. Library budgets are notoriously early casualties in times of financial stress. In many schools, the need for elementary teacher planning time is addressed by requiring the media specialist to babysit students for some part of the day. The school board in one Midwestern city recently gave serious consideration to a proposal to do away with high school libraries, buying into the notion that a bank of computers, a stack of CD-ROMS, and an Internet connection would serve as well.

The Building Level

The building level is the second place where a price is paid for erroneous principal perceptions. Willing and knowledgeable school library media specialists can make significant contributions to building-level effectiveness beyond providing information as requested and teaching research skills to students. If recognized as having something to offer, library media specialists can help address challenges across a wide spectrum, including such areas as helping administration and faculty respond to reform initiatives, reduce the odds of losing at-risk students, facilitate and strengthen induction of new teachers, and improve community relations. School efficiency and effectiveness can be improved if principals recognize and trust the resources resident in media centers and media specialists.

One of the ironies hidden in the costs of erroneous perceptions is that few people recognize a price is being paid. Because the library media center and specialist are not in the mainstream of administrative thinking, most principals do not recognize what they might gain if they included the talents and skills of media specialists in their planning. Conversely, they do not recognize what is lost by not doing so. The cost here is paid by media specialists, teachers, and students.

Across the Field of Education

The broadest level on which erroneous principal perceptions are costly is across the field of education as a whole. Superintendents are drawn from the ranks of principals. Professors of educational administration are drawn from the ranks of principals and superintendents, as are the leaders of administrative professional organizations. These are the people who drive many school reform efforts. Their inability to see and understand the library media potential causes library media programs and specialists to be ignored in reform proposals. Any review of the major reform documents since *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983) reveals the absence of library media as a component of restructuralist thinking. The NASSP provided an excellent example of reformist thought processes in 1996. Its blue-ribbon panel of experts, drawn from public schooling and higher education, reported its thinking on what high schools should look like as the new century opened in a document entitled *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution.* The report is nearly silent about media centers and media specialists, according them no specified role in its advocacy of individualized instruction, technology, new teaching practices, heavy staff development, and curriculum integration.

The invisibility of library media programs and school library media specialists is also reflected in popular notions of schools and school improvement ideas. The cover article of a fall 1997 issue of *Time* magazine dealt with what makes a good school—and school library media centers were left out. This oversight was further proof that administrators do not perceive media centers and media specialists as central to schooling. The reporters for *Time* pulled their information from researchers, from published works, from public documents, and from interviews with scholars, legislators, school board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers. If the *Time* writers did not mention, let alone give credit to, library media centers and specialists for some measure of school quality, it is because neither did those documents and people.

School library media specialists pay the price of erroneous principal perceptions by being ignored at a personal, building, and field-wide level—and this is devastating to a committed educator because it is not paid by media specialists alone. Teachers pay because principals do not know how media specialists can help them and so do not facilitate mutually beneficial interactions. Principals pay because they cannot see how media specialists

can help them be better administrators. Ultimately, students pay because teachers and administrators do not maximize the resources available to them. Everyone loses.

How Perceptions Can Be Altered

Neither time nor good work are likely to alter an uninformed principal's perceptions of libraries and librarians. Weick (1979), a leading organizational researcher, tells us that believing is seeing, and there is considerable research evidence to suggest that he is right. Studies in belief and attitude formation tell us that people seldom seek out, and often ignore, evidence contrary to their established beliefs (Good, 1998). Instead, people's preconceptions usually guide the kinds of information to which they pay attention because their preconceptions tell them which information is relevant to a given topic or situation. As a result, most people generally select and then interpret and recall information that is consistent with beliefs and theories they already hold (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Moreover, most of us are prone to accept belief-supportive information uncritically, but only slowly come to recognize and acknowledge disconfirming evidence (Tetlock, 1985). In short, so long as principals believe in the librarian stereotype, even librarians' best work may not alone alter long-held views. Worse, long-held stereotypical views may never allow principals to see that librarians ought to be given opportunities to engage in more and different activities than are now open to them.

The only way to change principal perceptions is to assault them directly, repeatedly, and from a multiplicity of directions. Reshaping perceptions takes time and effort and commitment. In the meantime, these are the perceptions that will guide most principals' relationships with school library media specialists.

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