Elementary School Principals' Perceptions of the Instructional Role of the School Library Media Specialist

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Abstract
Studies conducted in numerous states by various researchers demonstrate that library media specialists who take an active role in the instructional process positively impact student achievement in their schools. Principals are the instructional leaders of their schools, yet the research indicates that they are not knowledgeable regarding the role of the library media specialist. This study explored Virginia elementary school principals' perceptions of the instructional role of the library media specialist, the effect of library schedule on these perceptions, and the origin of these perceptions. Principals who responded to the study strongly endorsed the role of library media specialist as teacher of information literacy skills and as instructional partner. There was no statistically significant difference in perceptions based on the type of library schedule in place—fixed, flexible, or mixed/combination. Respondents indicated that they learn about the instructional role of the library media specialist from library media specialists with whom they work, either in their current positions as principals or through their previous experiences as classroom teachers. Principals form their views based on both negative and positive interactions with library media specialists and base their expectations of their current and future library media specialists on these prior experiences and expectations. This finding indicates that school library media specialist preparation programs should prepare their graduates to positively present their key instructional role and that training in this area should be provided for those library media specialists already in the field. Another key finding was that principals place primary responsibility for initiation of collaboration at both the individual teacher and the school level with the library media specialist. Further research is warranted to explore how principals facilitate full implementation of the instructional role of the library media specialist in their schools.

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