

Foreword

A Viable Partnership for School Renewal

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This book proposes an expanded role for school library media specialists. It is a role that calls for sophisticated managerial competency and places greater responsibility for success of the school's instructional program on the library media specialist. The reason someone is needed so badly to fill that position is that our schools are under siege to provide better instruction, yet principals today are so overwhelmed with other managerial tasks that little time is left for instructional leadership. Teachers must attack problems at the classroom level, but someone needs to coordinate instructional improvement efforts across the school. It makes sense for an appropriately prepared library media specialist to assume this responsibility. *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*, the latest set of professional guidelines, encourages this role under the banner of instructional consulting.¹

Jane Bandy Smith and I first suggested this approach in 1984 in presentations to a professional conference of the American Association of School Librarians and, shortly thereafter, to the annual meeting of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Let me highlight important considerations in our proposal for the principal to delegate coordination of the instructional program to the library media specialist.

This proposal for delegated coordination responsibilities is done with full realization that the principal still will be ultimately responsible for seeing that instructional improvement services are delivered. We advocate delegated responsibility, not abdicated responsibility. Such an approach would allow principals to extend their leadership through more creative use of personnel, yet not lose their influence. Although the proposal was designed for the elementary or middle school level, which often has a single media specialist and a single administrator, it is also viable for schools with administrative and media staffs, which include most high schools.

The role of a media specialist has changed from the days when he or she was "keeper of the books." Today, a media specialist has a teaching background and accepts the task of helping teachers and students make the best use of information that is accessed. A media specialist is in frequent contact with the total school population, and he or she is involved in the school's instructional efforts on a daily basis. Although it is true that all media specialists are not yet prepared to serve as instructional coordinators, many are.

Given the responsibility for coordinating school program improvement, the media specialist would need to assume responsibility for all instructional resources. Traditionally, textbooks have been handled separately from library media, but the line between text and media has become increasingly blurred as textbooks arrive with multimedia kits, manipulatives, or compact disks. Information is information—regardless of the format—and as the school's information manager, the media specialist should be involved in acquisition, organization, distribution, and utilization.

The first consideration involves time use priorities. If the media specialist is to share the responsibility of coordinating instructional improvement efforts and to assist the principal with school improvement efforts, it will be necessary to reorder media program priorities. It is not possible for media specialists to continue all the clerical or creative activities they currently provide and move into the instructional improvement role. Media programs also will have to make use of automation and paraprofessional aides to continue the current level of media services concurrent with filling the role in school improvement.

Second, as a helper for teachers, it is important that the media specialist not be placed in the position of identifying weaknesses for the principal to use in evaluation but rather have the goal of aiding other professionals in solving instructional problems. Conversely, it must be recognized that efforts to completely separate the consultative and evaluative leadership responsibilities would be out of step with current accountability trends. These trends require those in helping positions either to be ultimately responsible for the improvement of those being helped or to be involved in the dismissal process. Therefore, when a media specialist aids a teacher in improving instructional effectiveness, the media specialist is aware of the efforts made to help the individual attain the desired levels of professional competence. Because the media specialist will have this information, he or she may be required to offer that evidence in a dismissal procedure. Willingness to cooperate in these procedures will be a new facet for most media specialists.

A third consideration is the attitude of teachers toward a media specialist operating within the instructional program. It is likely that the most difficult aspect of instituting a delegated leadership approach to instructional improvement is enlisting the cooperation of classroom teachers. Experience has shown that principals are more open to media specialists operating in curriculum and instructional design than are teachers. Therefore, if the media specialist is to share the responsibility for instructional effectiveness, it will be critical for the principal to facilitate faculty acceptance of the specialist's new role. Given the

administrative support, it will then be up to the media professional to make those instructional leadership services more valued by the teachers.

Also important for the success of an instructional team will be the provision of adequate communication opportunities among team members. Flexible scheduling for library media center use promotes such opportunities. At a minimum, this will mean scheduled meetings with teachers for planning and problem solving. Chance meetings in the lunchroom, library, or hall will not suffice. Although such communication will require time and effort, it can produce a more effective instructional program, which is the ultimate goal of all the team members.

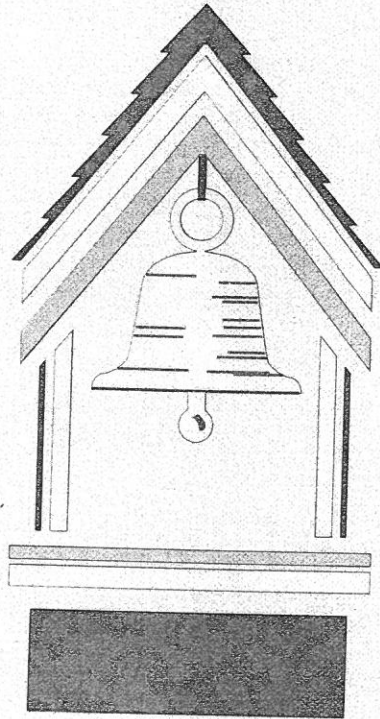
Information contained in *Renewal at the Schoolhouse* suggests many ways to build team spirit, to motivate staff members, to improve school planning, to make more efficient use of time, and to instigate change. Certainly these efforts are needed today.

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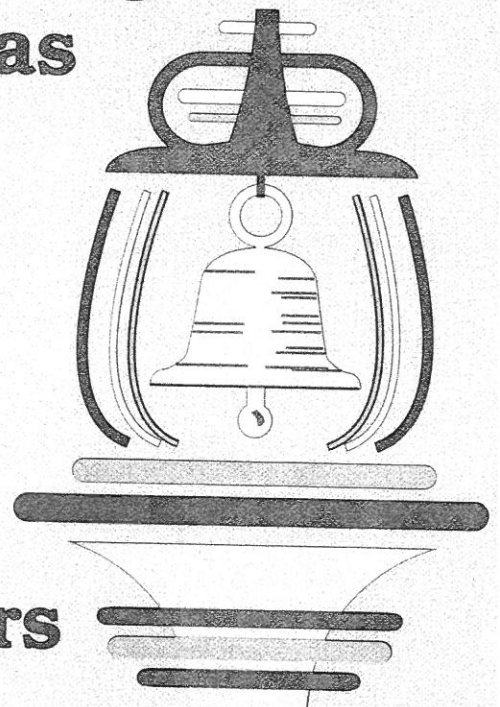
1. American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technology, *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1988), 34-39.

Renewal at the SCHOOLHOUSE

*Ben B. Carson and
Jane Bandy Smith,
Editors*



**Management
Ideas
for
Library
Media
Specialists
and
Administrators**



*To Mary Nell Carson and to Bill David Smith
who renew our spirits and help manage our lives.*

B.B.C. and J.B.S.



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