Article Critique #1: A case study of one district’s implementation of Information Power

Tina Launey

MEDT 7469: Supervision of Library Media Programs

January 17, 2011
In her article entitled “A case study of one district’s implementation of Information Power,” Kathy Latrobe points to the longstanding roots from which the Information Power guidelines derive, stating that “the principles of planning and evaluation articulated in Information Power have been integrated into good practice for the last half century” and that past and current efforts to integrate “planning and evaluation activities for library media programs reflect the larger scope of contemporary educational reform.” In other words, the Information Power guidelines, established by the American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology in 1998, build upon a long history of assessment-driven practice that is used to plan and implement effective programs centered around the concept that “the purpose of assessment is to educate” (Latrobe, 2001). In this article, Latrobe examines one school district’s implementation of the guidelines laid out in Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning. The district, located in the southwestern United States, was chosen based on its exemplary standing and its history of representing best practice. Although Latrobe advises that the results of this case study cannot be extrapolated to other school districts, the outcomes of this study provide valuable insight for library media supervisors wishing to facilitate the development of standards-based library media programs driven by a common mission to enable students to become effective, independent, lifelong learners.

Over a period of three semesters in 1998-1999, principals, media specialists, and district-level administrators in this school district met to discuss the implications of the national Information Power guidelines, with the goal that they would be “institutionalized as an ongoing force for program change” (Latrobe, 2001). Following these discussions, media specialists
participated in a workshop, during which they shared examples of information literacy standards that were already integrated throughout the district and completed a questionnaire entitled “Assessing the School Library Media Program and Its Partnerships.” This assessment enabled media specialists to analyze their instructional practices in conjunction with the *Information Power* guidelines. In 1999, teachers from 15 elementary schools, four middle schools, and two high schools were brought into the process as well—the guidelines and the information literacy standards were explained to them, and they completed the same media program assessment anonymously. The “assessment instrument facilitated communication and data collection among various audiences” by providing information that could be used to develop collaborative action plans for school library media programs and enabling the district library media coordinator to monitor the implementation process long-term throughout the district (Latrobe, 2001).

The survey results, examined at the district level, revealed that teachers approved of their school media programs in the realms of teach and learning, that program participation correlated positively to program approval, and that among the stakeholders involved in the planning and evaluation process, the library media specialist’s behavior was the strongest predictor of program progress. Interestingly, the ratings of program progress were higher for secondary schools than elementary schools on nine out of the ten principles included in the assessment. Based on her interpretation of the data, Latrobe asserted that “differences among schools emphasize the importance of the collaborative development of unique site-based improvement plans” (Latrobe, 2001). For example, specific components of an individual school’s improvement plan might drive the focus of that school media center’s implementation of the guidelines; relationships and perceptions between stakeholders—including the media specialist, administrators, teachers, and/or community members—at another school might influence that school’s planning priorities.
Latrobe explicitly cautions that the conclusions in this case study cannot be generalized outside of this school district, though they do speak to the success of stakeholder collaboration and participation in evaluating school library media programs, with the goal of aligning them with individual school improvement plans and the *Information Power* guidelines.

Although the specific results of this case study cannot be generalized to other school districts, from the perspective of a supervisor of library media programs, framing an evaluation of a district’s library media programs using nationally recognized standards seems like a powerful first step to increasing collaboration among media specialists, teachers, and administrators. First of all, attempting to align a district’s media programs with the *Information Power* guidelines provides valuable evidence that media centers play an integral role in implementing school- and district-wide standards-based curricula. Furthermore, initiating this process within a school district would provide key information about the current perception of school library media programs among stakeholders, and would indicate what action steps need to be taken to further the development of standards-based programs that are essential components of the instructional environment. Implementing these guidelines district-wide would also add a new level of accountability by generating district-level awareness of the degree to which its media programs currently align with established national guidelines. Working as a group to identify information literacy standards that meet these guidelines would also create a degree of accountability among media specialists, as they develop shared understandings and goals for their programs. Because the *Information Power* guidelines represent decades of integrated planning and evaluation, they form a solid foundation upon which to develop district-level goals for school library media programs.

References