EVALUATING THE SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER

Analysis Techniques and Research Practices

Nancy Everhart

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School Library Media Center

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Nancy Everhart, Ph.D.
Division of Library and Information Science
St. John's University
Jamaica, NY

To Harry, Drew, and Keith Everhart

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Preface

School library media specialists are very busy people! With the many duties that they must attend to, media specialists often list conducting evaluations low on their list of priorities. In addition, many school library media specialists would like to conduct evaluations but require knowledge on how and what to evaluate in the school media center. This book addresses both problems. It points out many areas to evaluate, explains how to do it, and provides instruments to use in the evaluation.

I have assembled what I believe are the best research and evaluation techniques and studies that have been conducted in school library media centers. To present the widest array of techniques possible, I have included a few studies and documents that are a bit dated but still extremely effective.

The results of many of the studies are presented in chart format with spaces available for you to fill in your own data. The data is for comparison purposes only and not to rank your program as "good" or "bad" but simply above average or below average. Numerous studies were taken from *School Library Media Quarterly*, which was the official research journal for school librarians (now online). If you are interested in research I suggest you look at Libraries Unlimited's Principles and Practices Series, which synthesizes pertinent research in the school library media field. *Educational Media and Technology Yearbook* is also an excellent annual resource. The Treasure Mountain Retreat brings together school library media researchers before each American Association of School Librarians (AASL) conference, and their proceedings describe research recently completed or in progress.

Sample evaluation forms were provided by state libraries and state departments of education. Included in this book are a wide variety of excellent forms produced by committees of school library media specialists, state association leaders, and library media supervisors. They are as diverse as they are rich. Space limits prevented me from including all of them, but the appendix lists and describes those available and how to obtain them.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of reasons to evaluate, types of evaluations, and methodologies. Guidelines for critical reading of research, an example of conducting a local study, and general overall evaluation instruments of the library media program are also provided.

Curriculum is the focus of chapter 2. It covers curriculum evaluation from the perspectives of students and teachers, collection support of the curriculum, and includes a self-assessment for media specialists of their role in the instructional design process at their schools. Another section describes various ways to assess student knowledge of information-processing skills.

Chapter 3 discusses both quantitative and qualitative ways of evaluating entire collections, as well as individual items within the collection. Suggestions are given on how to interpret the data obtained.

Results from research as well as suggestions from experienced professionals and state guidelines form the backbone of chapter 4, "Facilities." There are tools for measuring entire facilities or specific aspects—equipment, computer facilities, and signage. A section on combined school-public libraries looks at this seldom-covered topic.

The instruments in chapter 5, which deal with technology, provide help in evaluating hardware, software, and even Web sites. I also report some baseline data on various forms of technology in school library media centers and suggest benefit-effectiveness and planning considerations for automated systems.

Chapter 6, on personnel, looks at the various roles of the school library media specialist. There are instruments to measure time expenditures and the fulfillment of various responsibilities. Data on national staffing patterns and research results describing outstanding library media specialists are provided for comparison purposes.

"Usage," chapter 7, covers a wide array of topics. I have included a description of methods for measuring how students and teachers use the center and the collection, circulation analyses, a discussion of output measures, interlibrary loan, volume loss, bibliometrics, and lists of heavily used magazines uncovered by research studies.

Once you have collected data, it is important to communicate it to the appropriate people. Share your findings with your principal, library media supervisor, or superintendent. State and local school media conferences are other good outlets. Because so many library media specialists work in isolation, you may want to locate someone else collecting data by communicating on the Internet. The evaluation techniques suggested in this book will bring problem areas to your attention. After that it is up to you to use common sense and make long- and short-range plans that will correct these problems by implementing appropriate strategies. Good luck!

Acknowledgments

My thanks go out to these graduate assistants at St. John's University, Division of Library and Information Science—George Bussberg, Jennifer McMahon, and Kathleen McKnight. George searched for and located much of the information that laid the groundwork for this book. Jennifer was instrumental in obtaining and analyzing the state documents for evaluation tools. Kathleen's contribution was in finding useful Web sites and pertinent dissertations. This book would not have been possible without their efforts.

I would also like to give my sincere thanks to the directors in State School Library Departments. They most generously sent me an outstanding collection of documents and were willing to share them with all of you.

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General Evaluation

A Few Thoughts About Evaluation

Evaluation should be a regular, ongoing part of your library media program. There are several reasons why you would want to conduct evaluations. First, you will want to know if you are "in sync" with your school's mission. Are you responsive to student, faculty, and administrative concerns and objectives? Schools are constantly changing organisms. Curricula change, faculty change, and county and state initiatives change. What worked in the past in your library media center may not be working now, and you need to do some evaluation to find out. Perhaps you have introduced a new program, bibliographic instruction method, technology, or signage. Your collection may have been moved or weeded. Evaluations conducted before and after the change has occurred will be useful to help you determine its impact.

Collecting hard data on various aspects of your library media program lends credence when you must communicate program needs to administrators. You make a greater impression when you come into a meeting with numbers and perhaps charts and graphs to get your point across. With today's computer software such visual aids are relatively easy to produce. In addition, hard data is a virtual necessity when applying for grant funding. You need to prove to the agency providing funds in concrete terms why you need the money and what you want to accomplish with it.

Perhaps you are a brand new school library media specialist with no idea how your situation compares to others. Even if you have been on the job for many years, you still may not have any idea. The data presented here will assist you in making some baseline determinations. You may want to have a neighboring school library media specialist, noted for having an excellent program, complete some of the surveys. Use that information to develop a plan to get where you want to be.

An evaluation can perform the following functions (Nevada Department of Education 1995, 36):

- Determines the success in attaining stated goals and objectives for the program.

- Determines the students' and teachers' needs that can subsequently be incorporated into program policies, procedures, activities, and services.

- Provides a basis for the allocation of resources.

- Recognizes the strengths and accomplishments of the library media program.

- Examines the impact of the library media program upon student learning.

Types of Evaluation

Library evaluation is either quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative evaluation involves collecting numerical data: circulation statistics, collection and equipment counts, number of classes using the media center, number of lessons planned with teachers, etc. Quantitative evaluation is a good place to start, especially for a novice media specialist. Many of the studies and guidelines in this book suggest types of quantitative data to collect to be used for comparison purposes. However, there is some danger to relying solely on quantitative evaluation. Woolls (1994, 207–8) cites some of the drawbacks:

> A major flaw of quantitative measures is that administrators place too much emphasis on counting things with little regard to their quality. To meet a requirement size for the media center, areas such as equipment storage closets or even a storage area in the basement may be designated part of the media center with little regard for proximity or access. The necessity of providing a certain number of books or videos per pupil may result in neglect of the weeding process. Collections may meet an arbitrary numerical count but be out of date, in poor condition, or of no value to the current curriculum. Obsolete or broken equipment may be left in closets gathering dust because its disposal would place the media center below the required numerical score. Administrators may also buy inferior products to achieve a standard number of holdings rather than purchase high-quality merchandise.

> Quantitative measures of service can be performed, but this may give a one-dimensional perspective. School library media specialists may distribute a checklist asking teachers to indicate which services they are receiving. A wide variety of services may be offered, but such a survey will give inaccurate results if most students and teachers are unaware that these services exist, or if many services are offered that are not requested by teachers or students. It will not matter if a service is available if no one makes use of that service for any reason. Although quantitative measures are often less helpful, some output measures are useful in describing the media program. Counting output will certainly confirm media center use. Output includes the number of teachers and students who come into the media center each day, an estimate of the number of materials that circulate, the percentage of the student body using the media center at least once a month, and other similar statistics. The better measure is the relationship of quantity to quality.

Quality is harder to gauge but ultimately more important. Quality measures often involve surveying or interviewing users about their satisfaction with the services, collections, and facilities of the library media center or calculating how information needs are being met. The following chart will help clarify the distinctions between quantitative and qualitative measures:

Quantitative Measures	Qualitative Measures
Number of lessons planned with teachers	Level of planning
Circulation of fiction books	Students' success rate in finding a desired fiction book
Number of periodical titles	Percentage of media center's titles cited in student research papers
Library attendance	Students' satisfaction with library hours

Stokes and Shields (1980) found that the types of evaluation conducted by school media specialists were strongly influenced by the kinds of records required by school administrators. Media specialists generated annual reports with the following evaluation data:

Type of Report	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Total Schools
Inventory of materials and equipment	177	86.8%
Written goals and objectives	86	42.2%
Circulation records	63	30.9%
Measures of user satisfaction	11	5.4%
No report required	27	13.2%
No response	8	3.8%

Of these, inventory of materials and equipment and circulation records would be quantitative measures, and measures of user satisfaction would be qualitative measures. Having written goals and objectives in place might be considered a quantitative measure, but determining how well the library meets its written goals and objectives would be considered qualitative. In the same study, the researchers asked experts in the area of school library media center evaluation for their recommendations on the sorts of evaluation they rate highly. The nine most useful procedures were

1. Survey of students who use the media center.

2. Survey of students who don't use the media center.

3. Survey of teacher satisfaction.

4. Occasional evaluation by an outside team.

5. Survey of administrative opinion.

6. Annual evaluation by an outside team.

7. Survey of parent or community opinion.

8. Record of total staff time spent on reference.

9. Annual media program self-evaluation.

Interestingly, all of these procedures examine outputs. There are sample instruments to collect each of these kinds of data throughout this book.

Evaluation Methods

The various types of evaluation methods used in libraries can be categorized as questionnaires, interviews, numbers-gathering, and observation (Johnson 1996). These methods are complimentary and can be used in combination to evaluate a service or project. Each of these techniques is discussed here within the context of the school library media center.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires, or surveys, can be used to gather information that is self-reported, reported from others, or reported from records. Numerous questionnaires are scattered throughout this book. Many are designed to gather information directly from the media specialist, such as information about the types of services offered, equipment, physical resources, curriculum involvement, etc. Because most school library media centers are one-person operations, you are in a knowledgeable position to answer these questions. Examples of self-reported surveys in this book are a self-assessment of the media specialist's role in the instructional design process, facility surveys, and collection surveys. One advantage of self-reported information is that it can be gathered very quickly. The information can be put to use or used in a planning process in short order. Often outside agencies, such as accreditation organizations, require a "self-study" to get you started thinking about future goals and objectives.

Other questionnaires in this book involve asking others—students, faculty, administration, and parents—for their input. Survey responses from others are especially useful for measuring attitudes. Surveys allow you to gather data from a large number of people in a short time, and the data can be analyzed and summarized easily. School media specialists have an added advantage in that they can assure a high response rate to their surveys. Teacher surveys can be placed in mailboxes, and students can be surveyed in classes or homerooms. Examples of questionnaires asking others for input in this book are in the chapters on collections, usage, and curriculum. To get honest responses, you must allow surveys to be anonymous and confidential—no names allowed!

Questionnaires using data that is reported from existing records typically involve circulation statistics. Examples of questionnaires using data reported in this book are relative use measures from circulation, expenditures surveys, and attendance logs. Other existing data could be budgets, inventory records, lesson plans, journals, logs, schedules, and interlibrary loan records.

If you are interested in composing your own surveys, the following list of suggestions (Busha and Harter 1980, 73–74) will help improve their quality:

1. Unless the nature of a survey definitely warrants their usage, avoid slang, jargon, and technical terms.

2. Whenever possible, develop consistent response methods.

3. Make questions as impersonal as possible.

4. Do not bias later responses by the wording used in earlier questions.

5. As an ordinary rule, sequence questions from the general to the specific.

6. If closed questions are employed, try to develop exhaustive and mutually exclusive response alternatives.

7. Insofar as possible, place questions with similar content together in the survey instrument.

8. Make the questions as easy to answer as possible.

9. When unique and unusual terms need to be defined in questionnaire items, use clear definitions.

10. Use an attractive questionnaire format that conveys a professional image.

Questionnaires employ measurement scales (Powell 1996). Examples of several types follow:

Yes or No answer:

I visit the library during lunch periods. _____ yes _____ no

Checklist:

Check the statement that best represents how easy to use the OPAC is:

_____ Able to use without help
_____ Able to use with onscreen help
_____ Able to use with media specialist's help
_____ Able to use with another student's help
_____ Not able to use

Scaled responses:

How often were materials you needed for school assignments not available for the following reasons:

	(4) Often	(3) Sometimes	(2) Rarely	(1) Never
Checked out	_____	_____	_____	_____
Missing from shelves	_____	_____	_____	_____
Lost	_____	_____	_____	_____
Mutilated (pages missing)	_____	_____	_____	_____

Please circle the number that corresponds to how satisfied you are with the following in the media center:

	No Opinion	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Seating	1	2	3	4	5
Lighting	1	2	3	4	5
Heat and air conditioning	1	2	3	4	5
Signs	1	2	3	4	5
Noise level	1	2	3	4	5
Cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5
Furnishings	1	2	3	4	5

How do you rate the media center staff?

Discourteous	1 - - - - - 2 - - - - - 3 - - - - - 4 - - - - - 5	Courteous
Not Helpful	1 - - - - - 2 - - - - - 3 - - - - - 4 - - - - - 5	Helpful

Three-point scales:

Low	Moderate	High
Higher	Same	Lower
Greater	Equal	Less
Definitely agree	Neutral	Definitely disagree
Above average	Average	Below average
Very often	Occasionally	Never

Four-point scales:

Many	Some	Very few	None
Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Daily	Weekly	Occasionally	Never
Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Once a semester

Five-point scales:

Strongly approve	Approve	Undecided	Disapprove	Strongly disapprove
Very high	Above average	Average	Below average	Very low
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Poor	Below average	Average	Above average	Excellent
Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good
Excellent	Very good	Average	Fair	Poor

Ranking in order of importance:

Please rank (1 to 5, with 5 being most important) what you have done to get magazine articles not available in our school media center:

_____ requested through interlibrary loan
_____ went to local university library
_____ went to local public library
_____ didn't try to get article
_____ used the abstract of the article

Open-ended questions:

1. Are there any materials, equipment, or services that you think the media center should offer that it doesn't currently?

2. What aspect of the media center most needs improvement?

Interviews

Interviews may be especially useful in gaining input from elementary school children because the chief skill needed by the respondent is the ability to speak. Interviewing children requires special considerations (McDonald and Willett 1990):

1. Children younger than eight generally understand twice as much language as they are able to express. They do understand; they just have limited abilities in articulation.

2. Use simple, direct words. Avoid pronouns, double negatives, if/then constructions, and complex sentences.

3. Children are egocentric. Provide plenty of time to listen to their responses, understand that they include themselves in each happening, and that the only experience important to them is their personal experience.

4. Make sure the environment in which the interview takes place is child-friendly. Toys, color, meeting eye-to-eye at the child's level, and making sure your nonverbal messages are welcoming are particularly important.

5. Be patient. The child does not particularly want to be interviewed; the interview is scheduled to meet your needs, not the child's. Give the child equal time; for however long the interview will take, the child gets that amount of time for their agenda.

6. Kids like to play, guess things, show adults that they are wrong, repeat, be powerful, take turns, be active, know what is going on, and leave a place with something in their hands.

Some of the advantages of interviews are that you can clarify misunderstood questions in the process, you can get responses quickly, and that interviewing can have a positive public relations effect because each participant receives personal attention (Johnson 1996). Some disadvantages are that interviews are time-consuming, are not the best approach if you are interested in specific figures, and the interviewee may be reluctant to reveal opinions or information—especially about sensitive issues. When multiple interviewers will be used, they must be trained so that they all ask the same questions and get back the same types of data.

A popular interview method for evaluation is the focus group interview. A focus group consists of a small, representative sampling of those people whose opinions you are interested in obtaining. They are interviewed together because group dynamics make it easier for some people to express attitudes, ideas, and opinions. It's better when using children if the participants don't know each other well. For example, you could choose about seven or eight freshmen to interview about how your orientation program for new students could be improved or a teacher from each grade in an elementary school to provide feedback about the library's physical layout. You might want to conduct a focus group interview before a written survey to get ideas about types of questions to ask, or after a survey has been analyzed to clarify certain responses.

Focus group interviews usually last about thirty to forty-five minutes with children and from forty-five minutes to an hour and a half with adults. You will usually ask about five open-ended questions with possible follow-ups for clarification (Walter 1992, 62–65). This sample set of questions is designed to find out how high school students use the library's LAN:

1. What do you use the library's computers for?

2. When do you use them?

3. What do you think about them?

4. How do you think improvements could be made to the LAN?

5. What is the best thing about the LAN?

The following are some suggestions for the actual focus group interview (Walter 1992, 62–65):

- Have the meeting in a comfortable, safe, or neutral location. Most participants like to sit around a table, but sometimes children feel more at ease on pillows on the floor.

- Have a tape recorder (with good batteries) and audiocassette plainly visible on the table.

- Explain again what you are doing and why. Be brief.

- Assure participants that what they say is confidential, that the tape will be used only to help you remember what was said, and that no one will be identified in any written report of the focus group. Tell them what will be done with their input; for example, it will be included in a report that goes to the school board. (Avoid promising any action as a result of their input.) Be brief.

- Explain that this isn't a test, that there are no right and wrong answers. Be clear that you genuinely want to know what they think. Again, be brief. You want to listen to them.

- Keep note taking to a minimum. Concentrate your attention on listening and understanding what you are hearing. It is helpful to have a colleague present to listen and take notes.

- Encourage each person to respond to each question, but respect any person's desire to remain silent.

- Allow participants to respond to each other; sometimes you get the best insights from their interaction.

- Keep participants on the topic unless their digressions are potentially useful.

- Avoid giving your own opinions or judgments on what is said. Active listening techniques may encourage and clarify the discussion, however. Try occasionally repeating a participant's statement in slightly different words.

- When you have finished your prepared questions, ask if there are any last remarks that will help you understand what the participants have to say on this subject.

- Thank everybody for participating. Assure the participants that they have been helpful.

- Avoid promising the participants that they will see the results of the focus group unless you have already agreed to this as a condition of their participation.

To analyze the results of the focus group interview, listen to the tape again as soon as possible and make notes of major themes, issues, or concerns. Write down three or four major themes. These themes are your findings. Support each statement with several direct quotes from the taped discussion; this is your evidence (Walter 1992, 62–65). Continuing the example of students' use of the LAN, the following (p. 10) could be the results of such an interview.

A. Students use the computers on the LAN for school assignments.

   • "In chemistry, we have to find three magazine articles a marking period and write a summary of them."

   • "We're required to do a career search on the guidance program for our counseling class."

   • "Our English teacher makes us compile a bibliography of sources for our term paper from the computer before we can get our topic approved."

B. Students use the computers on the LAN for personal information needs.

   • "I was able to access home pages of all the colleges I am considering applying to. There was so much information there that helped me narrow down my choices!"

   • "Sometimes I just like to browse all of the topics you can find on InfoTrac. It's really interesting."

   • "I found out when my favorite group was going to be playing in our area."

C. Students find it frustrating when they don't have access to a computer terminal.

   • "Three times straight when our history class came to the library to work on our reports, I couldn't get on the computers even though we took turns."

   • "We need more computers."

From your results, you can write a report using the following outline (Walter 1992, 62–65):

   1. Purpose of the study.

   2. Study procedures. Describe focus groups (and any other methods used to collect data).

   3. Results. Use the format described in the previous section.

   4. Discussion. Elaborate on the implications of the results.

   5. Recommendations.

In this instance, you may want to use the results of your focus group interviews to recommend adding computers to the LAN.

Numbers Gathering

Numbers gathering might be the only type of evaluation performed by many school library media specialists, simply because it is traditional. Compiling circulation and inventory statistics and keeping track of attendance are prevalent, without much thought going into how to use these statistics for comparisons, trend analysis, and the achievement of goals. Many other types of numbers can be collected, put to use in simple formulas, and interpreted for beneficial school library media center evaluation.

Public libraries have devised an entire system of these formulas, called output measures (Walter 1992, 62–65). Outputs measure what is used: fill rates, program attendance, completed

reference queries, furniture, etc. In the chapter on usage, many of these formulas are presented and explained. Also in that chapter, more sophisticated analysis of circulation statistics, adapted from academic libraries, is illustrated.

Observation

Watching users' behavior is an ongoing activity in school library media centers. We do it informally all of the time. However, you can conduct formal evaluations by observation of such things as student behaviors at the circulation desk, online catalog, or card catalog; searches of CD-ROMs and the Internet; the use of special collections, such as reference, vertical file, career center, and biographies; the use of facilities; teacher behavior with classes visiting the library; student behaviors before and after instruction; the use of displays, bulletin boards, learning centers, and handouts; and behaviors at special programs. In this book, observation techniques are used in unobtrusive measures of facilities, calculating time expenditures and evaluating student and faculty use.

When using observation as an evaluation technique, one needs to define the behavior to be studied and standardize the process used to observe. You need to determine (Zweizig and Johnson 1996)

1. What you are trying to learn. What will you study and why is it important? Sharply defining what will be studied and how results will be used will increase your chances of collecting interpretable and useful data.

2. Where you are going to make the observations. Observations could be made of one grade level, at all OPAC terminals, or other defined locations. Explicitly defining the locations at which to make observations helps in knowing where results could be applied.

3. When the observations will occur. Library use differs by time of day, day of the week, time of the year, and so on. The main concern with sampling is representativeness: Are the times selected for study representative of the overall use of the library in the aspect being studied?

4. Who will make the observations. In a school library media center, this will most likely be the media specialist. It is important to not attract notice so that when you record your observations you do not alter the behavior of the people being observed.

5. How the observations will be made. You should make test observations to determine how observations will be made and to learn how well your procedures work. The resulting methods should be included in the report of the results of the observation.

6. How the observations will be recorded. Comparability of observations requires that they are recorded in a standardized form. Evaluation designers should create and test a form that will include the needed information, such as who made the observation, when it occurred, where, what was observed, and so on.

7. How the results will be analyzed. A plan for analyzing the results should be in place before data collection has begun. How to analyze the data will be guided by thinking about the kinds of statements you intend to make in the conclusions. For example, if you want to be able to discuss how long users wait to use the electronic periodical index stations, then the observation form must have a place for noting the times a

given user arrives in line and starts using the station. The analysis will involve making a calculation of the time spent waiting by subtracting the time of arrival from the time of sitting down. The report will need to summarize the observed times so that an administrator can see their range and pattern. If you want to make a statement such as "Half of our users spend more than _____ minutes waiting to use our CD-ROM periodical index," in order justify purchasing more stations, then your results will have to be arranged in order of time spent waiting so that it is possible to identify the middle score (the median).

8. How to report the results. From the beginning, it is well to think about the report of findings. In general, the task of the report is to explain the data presented and to interpret it in terms of the reasons for the study. (Return to the first point: What you are trying to learn.) To communicate the richness of the observations made, the report will likely contain a mix of numerical data and narrative description: "Over half of the brochures were picked up at the end of the program. One student called out to her companions, "Look, there are other programs coming up!"

The School Library Media Specialist as Researcher

As you consider becoming involved in conducting school library media center research, reports of others' research will interest you. Reading research requires practice. Practitioners in the school library media field who wish to be more knowledgeable consumers of research can consider the elements for evaluating the research of others listed in the following section (Grazier 1982).

Guidelines for Critical Reading

1. Preliminary Evaluation

   Am I interested in any facet of this report—the problem studied, the methodology, the findings, or the conclusions?

2. Review of Problem Statement

   Does the investigator state the question or hypothesis that underlies the study? Is the problem stated solvable? Are the terms defined clearly? Is the context of the study explained? Does the study seem important or trivial?

3. Literature Review

   What kind of literature review, if any, is presented? Descriptive or evaluative? Does it describe adequately the research cited? Are the studies recent and relevant? Do they include contradictory findings? Did the researcher relate the findings to her study? Does the study attempt to refine earlier studies? To replicate them?

4. Method Questions

   Subjects studies: What individuals, groups, or materials were the subjects of the research? How were the subjects chosen? If the study used experimental and control groups, were the

subjects from the target population assigned on a random basis? If the researchers used a survey method, was the group studied a random sample of the population?

Definitions: Are definitions stated in operational terms? Are the operational definitions specific enough that you could replicate the study? Does the researcher relate the operational definition to a conceptual definition gleaned from current theories and prior research?

Data Collection: What data were collected? By what method? When and where?

Control: Did the researcher design the study so as to eliminate explanations other than the one hypothesized? Was more than one group studied so that a comparison could be made?

5. Data Analysis

Are the researcher's analyses sufficiently complete for you to appraise them? Do summaries of the data provide enough information for your purposes? Were statistical methods used to test the hypotheses? Were the results of the study worth interpreting statistically?

6. Conclusions: Explanations and interpretations of the findings

Does the researcher answer the questions posted in the study? Do the interpretations jibe with the data? Has the researcher eliminated possible alternative answers to the problem studied? Do the statements about implications of the study for library media practice grow logically from the findings?

Conducting a Local Study

Local research at the building level will be less complicated than that of formal studies. The media specialist has neither the time nor the money to plan and conduct an investigation requiring the careful control and analysis suggested in the preceding section. The basic steps for local research involve (Grazier 1982) (1) identifying the problem, (2) translating the problem into a researchable question, (3) deciding upon the information needed for an answer, (4) collecting the information, (5) summarizing and analyzing the findings, (6) drawing conclusions, and (7) reporting results.

The following is an example of a simple study, focusing on the library's CD-ROM periodical index.

Problem: A new CD-ROM periodical index has been installed in the library media center one month ago. Although it appears students like it and most are successful in finding information on it, there are still some students having difficulty. We would like to pinpoint the specific problems so we can remedy them.

Researchable Question: What factors cause failure for students using the new CD-ROM periodical index?

Information Needed for an Answer: A list of common problems.

Collecting the Information:

1. Conduct a focus group interview with students to determine the most typical problems.

2. Observe students at the index; design a form to check off the most common problems after providing assistance.

3. Interview teachers whose classes have used the CD-ROM periodical index for assignments.

Summarizing and Analyzing the Findings:

1. 34% of students have trouble with subject search methodology.

2. 65% of students do not understand the scope of the database.

3. 82% of students do not read help screens.

Drawing Conclusions: Include the elements students are having problems with in bibliographic instruction. Design signs alerting students to the availability of help screens.

Reporting Results: Ask for five minutes to present a summary of the findings at the next faculty meeting. Explain to teachers the need to provide time for the media specialist to briefly demonstrate and teach about the CD-ROM when classes come to the media center. Reiterate the need for advance notice of class assignments so this resource can be used to its fullest.

Getting Started

Conducting an overall self-evaluation of the components of your school library media program is an efficient way to identify areas that need improvement or further investigation. Instruments provided by the Departments of Education in Maryland, Ohio, and Alaska, figures 1.1 (pp. 15–20), 1.2 (pp. 21–32), and 1.3 (pp. 33–44), are good for this purpose. Each tool was chosen because of its nonthreatening nature, generalizability, and unique strengths. The Alaska form's design ranks each program element simply as "need assistance," "in progress," or "accomplished." It can be completed relatively quickly. The Ohio instrument is aimed at pointing out discrepancies in the current status of the program and the desired status. Space is provided for writing comments and listing resources required to get from one level to the other, which can provides direction in planning. Maryland's survey of compliance with state standards is an excellent guide for the beginning evaluator because it lists examples of documentation that can be used to determine if the standards are being met.

Figure 1.1. Evaluation Guidelines for Alaska School Library Media Programs.

The Alaska Association of School Librarians prepared this guidelines checklist in response to the publication *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs.* It can be used in self-evaluation of your program and may assist in planning sessions with your administration.

	Need Assistance	In Progress	Accomplished
MANAGEMENT/ADMINISTRATION			
1. The school library media center has a written library policy which includes a statement of purpose plus long and short range goals.	☐	☐	☐
2. The school library media center has a collection development plan.	☐	☐	☐
3. The school library media center has a plan for implementing technology as it relates to collection management and access to information.	☐	☐	☐
4. The school library media center has a procedures handbook.	☐	☐	☐
5. The school library media center is identified as a budget category in the annual school budget.	☐	☐	☐
6. The school library media specialist or school library media center has professional membership in organizations such as the Alaska Library Association and the Alaska Association of School Librarians, the American Library Association, etc.	☐	☐	☐
7. The school library media center owns a copy of the booklet *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* and has a plan for implementing these guidelines.	☐	☐	☐
8. The school library media center staff actively seeks input from students, staff, parents, and community in regularly evaluating the school library media collection, services, and programs.	☐	☐	☐