

LIBRARIANS AS LEARNING SPECIALISTS

Meeting the Learning Imperative
for the 21st Century



Allison Zmuda • Violet H. Harada

Foreword by Grant Wiggins

Librarians as Learning Specialists

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Foreword

Everyone who works in schools has an efficient set of indicators for quickly sizing up a place. We look for telltale signs and listen for revealing sounds to determine whether the school is purposeful and healthy. For me, the library or media center has always been such a revealing barometer of the institution. You can always tell how focused, happy, and intellectually lively a school is by studying the media center. Do the kids love to be there? Or do they only hurry in and out to get a book? Is there quiet space as well as lively space, since genuine study requires both? Or is the room a caricature of libraries and librarians of our youth, where “shhhhh” is the most common form of “teaching”? Do students eagerly work together to research an essential question and prepare a group project, or do they mostly just check e-mail and Facebook pages, and then quickly leave? Do teachers just dump kids for a period in the library or are they working with the librarian, as a team, to support mutual programmatic goals?

The library-media center is more than just a space or resource, then. It is a window into how well the entire staff understands learning and honors best practice. If the staff understands how people learn, then the media center is a hub of core activity. If the school is committed to long-term mission-related goals, teachers and learning specialists constantly work together.

Allison Zmuda and Violet Harada have written an important book. They have cast the role of school librarians as learning specialists as appropriately central, not marginal. They describe the *ideal*—not in the sense of “hopelessly idealistic” but in the sense of “powerful and clear model to aim for.” The learning specialist has a key role to play in schools, and this book explains how this can happen.

This book gets beyond the typical hand-wringing laments and naïve idealism of most books on education. To invoke a word that has become a bit worn—but which could not be more apt here—this book will *empower* learning specialists to move from the margins to the mainstream in their schools. It will show them (and their superiors) how they are uniquely suited to take a leadership role in moving schooling into the 21st century and shed its obsolete 19th-century habits.

Readers, be they theorists or school administrators, will come away with wonderful practical advice on how to ensure such a change, and how to transfer the ideas and tools here to broader reform concerns. As the authors note, quoting Ross Todd, “The hallmark of a school library in the 21st century is not its collections, its system, its technology, its staffing, its buildings, but its actions and evidences that show that it makes a real difference to student learning, that it contributes in tangible and significant ways to the development of meaning making and constructing knowledge.” This book takes us a long way in showing how that can occur and why it must.

—Grant Wiggins

Acknowledgments

This book is dedicated to all the superintendents, assistant superintendents, library media specialists, classroom teachers, and parent volunteers who are committed to collaborate together to achieve the mission of schools. We have met so many folks in local districts who believe that what happens in the library is at the heart of the work of the school because it brings the world to the local community, inspires the curiosity and imagination of students, and brings people together to explore and communicate ideas.

Sharon Coatney, acquisitions editor for Libraries Unlimited, was the matchmaker and critical friend who made this book possible. Her passion for this project was immediate, and her understanding and feedback along the way greatly improved the book's development. Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins laid down the conceptual gauntlet in *Schooling by Design* that motivated the approach and the sequencing of the content herein. Jay was a great friend and sounding board throughout this project, and Grant was so gracious to craft the foreword for us. There are so many other friends we have met along our journey who through our conversations influenced this volume, including: Gary Hartzell, Carl Harvey, and the leaders of the Association for Indiana Media Educators (AIME), Deb Levitov, David Loertscher, and Ross Todd. Thank you to our families for their support as we worked on this project over phone lines and computer connections during the past year: Tom, Cuda, and Zoe Zmuda, and Wayne Harada.

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