
As we enter the 21st century, library media specialists (or, as we refer to them in Canada, teacher-librarians) find themselves in challenging circumstances affected by budgetary cuts, shrinking collections and staff re-assignments. In Librarians as Learning Specialists: Meeting the Learning Imperative for the 21st Century, Zmuda and Harada provide these professionals with the tools needed to defend the important role of the school library and its staff in student learning. Other members of the education community, including administrators, classroom teachers and curriculum consultants, may also find much of the content of this work pertinent. In a little over one hundred densely packed pages, it addresses topics that are relevant to all educators: effective leadership, goal setting, lesson design and learning assessment.

The book’s organization fits well with how a practitioner might use it. The text is divided into four chapters, each covering a broad theme: the school mission statement, the role of a library media specialist, instructional design, and finally, assessment. Each chapter is then further divided into sections that tackle different aspects of the theme: its significance, predictable problems, collaboration challenges and implications for the library media specialist. A fifth and final chapter, “Looking to the Future,” deals with the central role school library specialists play in helping students navigate today’s digital media landscape.

To allow for further expediency in navigating the book and locating the part that answers a practitioner’s immediate question, the table of contents provides extensive detail about the topics covered in each of the four sections within a chapter. In fact, the table of contents lists the contents of the book down to the single page. Furthermore, an index provides entry points into the text by both topic and cited author.

In the central narrative, as Zmuda and Harada address obstacles faced by education professionals, they consistently demonstrate their understanding of both the practical constraints faced by library media specialists and the needs and priorities of school and board level administrators. They do not shy away from questioning long-standing assumptions and practices and providing alternatives that are more in-line with contemporary theories of learning. They dismiss, for example, the practice of requiring students to “collect information or resources in the library media centre and then leave” (p. 40), calling it “bad business” which does not result in any meaningful learning for the students.

Zmuda and Harada’s extensive research, which is reflected in the list of references that closes each chapter, is a real strength of this text. In doing their research, the authors looked beyond the literature in education and library science; rather, the research spans related fields like psychology, history and information technology. This research enables Zmuda and Harada to introduce examples of the kinds of thoughtful policy and planning documents they feel are needed in schools. For example, in Chapter 2, which deals with the professional duties of the library media specialist, the authors include figure 2.1, a
document from the Calgary Board of Education detailing the duties and responsibilities of teacher-librarians (p. 28). In Chapter 4, several exemplary assessment instruments created by teachers and librarians are similarly included.

An additional strength of this book is the extensive experience both authors have with the subject matter. Zmuda, a seasoned curriculum and instruction development consultant, has four other books to her name. Harada, a professor of library and information science, is also well published and able to draw upon her own experiences working as a library media specialist. Finally, the tremendous effort the authors (and editors) took to organize the content thematically, and to enforce a uniform structure on all chapters, results in a text that is easy to navigate and refer to in one’s daily professional practice.

Although geared primarily toward library media specialists practicing in the U.S., with references to standards developed by the American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (p. 86) and best practice examples from American schools, this book should not be dismissed by school library staff in Canada. It contains valuable advice that can enhance the practice of any library professional working to support learning in a school environment.

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