

The Library Media Specialist Taxonomy

A taxonomy is an array of concepts or principles in an order reflective of difficulty, achievement, level of depth, or some other meaningful measure. The library media specialist taxonomy was developed by this author 20 years ago to assist professionals in understanding a conceptual framework of their role in an educational institution. (See figure 3.1) At its base lie elements that establish an organizational entity, but as its numbered levels increase, so do the library media specialist's power over and influence on academic achievement in the school.¹

The potential for building partnerships between teachers and librarians is no accident. State certification rules in many states of the United States require that the school librarian be educated first as a teacher and then as a library media specialist—the latter usually being a part of a master's degree program. In the majority of cases, librarians have had background as a classroom teacher. In Canada, teacher-librarians must have experience as classroom teachers first. In both the United States and Canada, the requirements emphasize the idea of a teacher-librarian, a colleague with the classroom teacher in the instructional process, one who is sympathetic to and supportive of the teacher's role.

The first responsibility of the library media specialist is to put into operation the four major programmatic elements of the library media program—collaboration, reading literacy, enhancing learning through technology, and information literacy—no matter what the shape or condition of the information infrastructure, the facilities, or the materials

¹ The taxonomy was first published in a slightly different form in David V. Loertscher, "Second Revolution: A Taxonomy for the 1980s," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 56 (February 1982): 412-21. It also appeared in the first edition of this book at a time when resource-based teaching and learning were the central focus of the programmatic element of the library. Revisions in the taxonomy for this edition reflect the preponderance of information technology in education and the multifaceted nature of the LMC program elements.

available. That is, the library media specialist begins at the top of the taxonomy, not at the bottom, in the quest to make a difference in teaching and learning in the school.

Each level of the taxonomy is an important piece of the total program, but each can also have its drawbacks. The library media specialist can become so involved in any one level of the taxonomy or in any one of the four programmatic elements that other levels are excluded or simply ignored. The best program is one that includes a healthy mix of all the levels of the taxonomy.

The Library Media Specialist's Taxonomy

1. NO INVOLVEMENT

The LMC is bypassed entirely.

2. SMOOTHLY OPERATING INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Facilities, materials, networks, and information resources are available for the self-starter delivered to the point of need.

3. INDIVIDUAL REFERENCE ASSISTANCE

The library media specialist serves as the human interface between information systems and the user.

4. SPONTANEOUS INTERACTION AND GATHERING

Networks respond 24 hours a day and 7 days a week to patron requests, and the LMC facilities can be used by individuals and small groups with no advance notice.

5. CURSORY PLANNING

There is informal and brief planning with teachers and students for LMC facilities or network usage—usually done through casual contact in the LMC, in the hall, in the teacher's lounge, in the lunch room, or by e-mail. (For example: Here's an idea for an activity/web site/new materials to use. Have you seen ...? There's a software upgrade on the network.)

6. PLANNED GATHERING

Gathering of materials/access to important digital resources is done in advance of a class project upon teacher or student request.

7. EVANGELISTIC OUTREACH/ADVOCACY

A concerted effort is made to promote the philosophy of the LMC program.

8. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOUR MAJOR PROGRAMMATIC ELEMENTS OF THE LMC PROGRAM

The four LMC program elements—

**collaboration,
reading literacy,
enhancing learning through technology, and
information literacy—**

are operational in the school. The LMC is on its way to achieving its goal of contributing to academic achievement.

9. THE MATURE LMC PROGRAM

The LMC program reaches the needs of every student and teacher who will accept its offerings in each of the four programmatic elements.

10. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Along with other educators, the library media specialist contributes to the planning and organization of what will actually be taught in the school or district.

Fig.3.1. The library media specialist's taxonomy.

The Solid Warehousing Services Building Block

Level 1—No involvement: **The LMC is bypassed entirely. Here the library media specialist, for whatever reason, makes no attempt to be involved in a particular sequence of instruction.**

Not every unit can be plugged into the center during the school day. A problem occurs, however, if nonuse is a habitual pattern for either teachers or students. Not all the teachers will ever be reached, nor will all the students, but these nonusers should be in the minority. The library media specialist must never give up trying to work with the nonuser even though success will be difficult to achieve.

Level 2—Smoothly operating information infrastructure: **Facilities, materials, networks, and information resources are available for the self-starter delivered to the point of need.**

Level 2 is basic to the complete program of library media services. At this level, the library media specialist has organized materials and equipment and information networks for the browser. The center is inviting and attractive. Patrons can find the materials or equipment they need, know how to use them, and can check them out for use at home or in the classroom. Information networks provide access to every educational space in the school and beyond into the students' homes. This level involves the selection, acquisition, presentation, and maintenance of the collection and information networks. Services at this level are the kind that no one notices when they are running smoothly but about which everyone complains when things go wrong. At its best, the information infrastructure is invisible to the user.

The major problem with this level is that infrastructure services expand to fill the time available. It is very easy to get stuck in this warehouse and never really progress beyond level 2. The infrastructure is never finished. Books must get shelved, software or hardware malfunctions must be diagnosed and fixed, cataloging of materials for the automated system must be completed. An entire day can be filled with exhausting warehousing functions and will be unprofitable in terms of a solid contribution to education.

Level 3—Individual reference assistance: **The library media specialist serves as the human interface between information systems and the user.**

Here the library media specialist assumes the magician's role, or in more formal terms, becomes the human interface between technology and users, making use of the ability to know where to locate important and trivial information and materials from a vast array of sources, whether these be in the LMC's collection, in a neighboring LMC, from the district LMC, from the public library, from an academic library, or from a national network or database. Level 3 includes reading, viewing, and listening advisory services for students and teachers.

Movement toward the "information society" adds another dimension to level 3. Students will need to learn how to handle information from sophisticated databases and high technology sources. This level assumes that the library media specialist may at times deliver the information directly to the user but will continually work to help patrons gain the skills they need to find and use information themselves through information systems and networks.

Level 3 services can often dominate the time of the library media specialist, and because this level of service is particularly interesting and stimulating, other levels of service can easily be pushed into the background.

Level 4—Spontaneous interaction and gathering: **Networks respond 24 hours a day and 7 days a week to patron requests and the LMC facilities can be used by individuals and small groups with no advance notice.**

During many instructional periods, a teacher and/or student will discover a new direction that is not in the instructional plan yet is too exciting to neglect. The library media specialist might respond at a moment's notice with materials, resource people, access to web sites, production activities, research projects, games, or any other activity that capitalizes on the unique teaching moment. These instant projects might last a few minutes in a single class or might grow to involve the whole school for a semester or even a year.

Spontaneous services, however, might become an excuse for a lack of planning by teachers or turn into babysitting. For students, this spontaneous need and the subsequent interaction can spark a life-long interest and even influence career choices.

Level 5—Cursory planning: There is informal and brief planning with teachers and students for LMC facilities or network usage— usually done through casual contact in the LMC, in the hall, in the teacher's lounge, in the lunch room, or by e-mail. (For example: Here's an idea for an activity/web site/new materials to use. Have you seen ...? There's a software upgrade on the network.)

When teachers and students accept the library media specialist as a source of ideas and the specialist blooms in this role, great things can occur. Library media specialists collect bags of tricks—ideas that have worked—from other teachers or other library media specialists, from principals, from conventions attended, from professional journals, and from their own creative minds. The library media specialist knows the sources for help—people, materials, and equipment—and knows where and how to get them. Teachers and students learn to depend on the library media specialist to generate solutions and solve problems.

Roadblocks can develop at this level if the library media specialist is perceived as a pest rather than a source of ideas.

Level 6—Planned gathering: Gathering of materials/access to important digital resources is done in advance of a class project upon teacher or student request.

When there is time to communicate with the teacher of a student project group about the topic of an upcoming unit, the library media specialist can assemble materials from many sources. Materials from the LMC can be gathered before the "eager beaver" students have time to raid the cache, a webography can be created, a neighboring school can lend its materials, public libraries can be put on notice of an impending demand, materials from other libraries can be collected, and free materials from agencies and businesses can be assembled. Given enough lead time, the library media specialist can flood the teacher with materials and information resources.

Gathering the right things at the right time for the right users, and in the right format, is no small task. Problems can develop if the library media specialist collects too much—on the wrong levels—for the wrong objectives. A clear idea of exactly what is needed is essential if success is to be achieved.

Level 7—Evangelistic outreach/advocacy: A concerted effort is made to promote the philosophy of the LMC program.

Here one thinks of a library media specialist who enthusiastically preaches the gospel of media and information technology through promotion, cultivation, stimulation, testimonial, recommendation, and selling, all with the concerted purpose of gaining converts among the students, the teaching staff, and the

administration. This might include teaching in-service workshops to promote multimedia and web production and/or use of information technology, showing teachers the various uses of equipment and materials and explaining how an information source can suit various ability and interest levels, promoting the usefulness of high-interest/low-reading-level books, or encouraging the use of interdisciplinary materials. For students, motivational campaigns are conducted to involve them in media and information technology experiences.

As in all types of evangelistic movements, the inattentive, the antagonistic, and the backsliders will be a problem. Promotional campaigns can backfire or be ineffective.

The Academic Achievement Building Block

Level 8—Implementation of the four major programmatic elements of the LMC program: **The four LMC program elements— collaboration, reading literacy, enhancing learning through technology, and information literacy—are operational in the school. The LMC is on its way to achieving its goal of contributing to academic achievement.**

At this level, the library media specialist, with the help of various advisory groups, has created a plan, an implementation strategy, and an evaluative process for each of the four major programmatic areas. Consider the following examples:

Collaboration. The library media specialist has a plan to meet with and plan resource-based instruction with teachers, departments, and grade levels. Willing teachers are the first clients, and units of instruction are planned, executed, and evaluated together. The core of willing teachers expands over time as the news of success travels. At some point, whole departments or grade-level teams have mandates/scheduled planning times with the library media staff.

Reading literacy. The library media specialist first creates access to an exciting array of print materials that students and teachers want to read. Access is provided in such a way that both the classroom and the home become print-rich environments as extensions of the store of books in the LMC. Every child or teen has a wide range of materials available at all times. Teachers and reading specialists work with the library media specialist to implement programs such as sustained silent reading, reading motivational programs, reading aloud, and other means of building capable and avid readers.

Enhancing learning through technology. The library media specialist realizes that networks and computers, plus other technologies such as digital video and digital cameras, only

provide potential to enhance learning and that improved learning is not an automatic result of ownership of these items. In-service training of both teachers and students demonstrates and encourages methods to exploit technology to enhance teaching strategies, learning content, and production of projects.

Information literacy. As collaborative projects are planned with teachers, information literacy instruction is inserted into the activities of the unit as appropriate. Attention is given to providing research strategies at the time of need, thus raising effectiveness and efficiency. Over time, learners gain their own command of information literacy strategies.

Level 9—The mature LMC program: The LMC program reaches the needs of every student and teacher who will accept its offerings in each of the four programmatic elements.

Maturity indicates the full implementation of a program element with full confidence that maximum impact is being achieved on a consistent basis. Teachers expect to collaborate; readers know and use the reading resources; both teachers and students expect to learn and be taught effective ways to use new technologies and software as they are developed. (The idea that "you teach me, I teach you, we teach each other, and we all help keep it working" is the rule, not the exception.) Teachers expect information literacy to be a part of their teaching strategies and students can vocalize their own information literacy model.

Level 10—Curriculum development: Along with other educators, the library media specialist contributes to the planning and organization of what will actually be taught in the school or district.

Curriculum development is more than just an invitation to attend curriculum meetings; it means that the library media specialist is recognized as a colleague and contributes meaningfully to planning. The knowledge of materials, sources, technology, present collections, and teaching/learning strategies makes the library media specialist a valuable asset as curricular changes are considered and implemented. The library media specialist will not be able to attend all of the curriculum committee meetings in all the disciplines on a regular basis but can serve as a consultant to the committee. When a textbook is being adopted, the library media specialist can give the committee a clear idea of how the present LMC collection and network access can support the philosophy and the daily requirements of that textbook. Advance planning for collection development can be done before the preferred text is adopted rather than trying to play a game of collection catch up.

One of the questions most often asked about the emerging role of the school library media specialist is whether the model demands too much for any single person to accomplish. Are we expecting too much of one person to be an expert in books, audiovisual and computer media, resource-based learning, the reference process, and management strategies? If there is not an adequate-sized staff in the LMC, the answer is probably yes. Research indicates that when the staff of any LMC falls below a full-time professional plus a full-time clerical and a full-time technician, the foundation elements of the program suffer.² Professionals tend to take on clerical roles because of the demands of the warehouse; direct services and collaboration suffer. This means that by cutting staff, the services having the greatest impact on education are cut. The same could be said in larger schools, where a single professional and a single clerical are insufficient to run a comprehensive program.

Library media specialists who find themselves in understaffed centers would be wise to find others to perform warehousing services and devote as much attention as possible to the four programmatic elements. Students, teachers, and volunteers should be required to pick up warehousing and technical services to allow the professional to have whatever educational impact is possible under the reduced staffing plan. For example, teachers would have to know how to troubleshoot the computers in their own areas, only rarely needing assistance from a technician who is part time or at the district level. Part-time library media specialists are particularly vulnerable to the demands of the infrastructure and of schedules. The four programmatic elements must always predominate whatever time the library media specialist has in a school.

The job of the library media specialist is a very creative one, full of exciting and varied experiences, but it requires a certain type of person to be successful. Alice Jenkins, Northwood Junior High School Library Media Specialist in Pulaski County, Arkansas,³ addressed this issue in an in-service program on the taxonomy. To be successful at each level, the library media specialist needs to have the following characteristics:

² David V. Loertscher, May Lein Ho, and Melvin M. Bowie, "Exemplary Elementary Schools and Their Library Media Centers: A Research Report," *School Library Media Quarterly* 15, no 3 (Spring 1987): 147-53.

³ Alice Jenkins, Northwood Junior Library Media Specialist, Pulaski County Schools, at a preconference in Dallas, Texas, 1983. A few revisions have been made for this edition.

Level 2—The warehouse:	Be organized.
Level 3—Individual assistance:	Be visible.
Level 4—Spur of the moment requests:	Be flexible.
Level 5—Brief planning:	Be positive.
Level 6—Planned gathering:	Be knowledgeable.
Level 7—Evangelistic outreach:	Be zealous.
Level 8—Implementation of program:	Be active.
Level 9—The mature LMC program:	Be accountable.
Level 10—Curriculum design:	Be resourceful.

Several research studies have probed the human qualities that characterize successful library media specialists.⁴ Herrin et al. found that the successful school library media specialist is one who:

- Has a positive self-concept
- May be shy/reserved but projects warmth
- Is bright, stable, enthusiastic, experimenting/exploring, trusting
- Is able to be self-sufficient
- Is confident of worth as an individual
- Enjoys people, work, variety/diversity
- Views change as a positive challenge
- Values communication
- Communicates effectively as an individual
- Is caring and especially attentive to others
- Is able and willing to clarify communications
- Is relatively self-disclosing
- Is uncomfortable with conflict

⁴ Barbara Herrin, Louis R. Pointon, and Sara Russell, "Personality and Communications Behaviors of Model School Library Media Specialists," *Drexel Library Quarterly* 21, no 2 (Spring 1985): 69-90. Reprinted in David V. Loertscher, ed., *Measures of Excellence for School Library Media Centers* (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1988). See also Jody Beckley Charter, "Case Study Profiles of Six Exemplary Public High School Library Media Programs" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1982). Charter gave a personality measure to her exemplary library media specialists, with some interesting contrasts to those of the study of Herrin et al.

- Is confident of ability to deal with difficult situations in a professional manner
- Is neither critical nor domineering
- Has no great need for achievement, power, or economic advantage
- Views self as leader in curriculum development
- Is willing to take the risks of being a leader

The portrait created is one that is interactive, dynamic, and changing, radiating vitality and exuding a confidence that says: "Even though I may feel reserved or shy, I am capable of leadership because I believe people are important."

This study points out what administrators in schools with good LMC programs already know: It takes a gutsy, creative, organized, and easy-to-get-along-with person to build an exemplary LMC program. It also requires a person willing to become a leader, not only in print media but also in every form of educational and information technology.

Attracting such people to the profession, particularly capable females, has been increasingly difficult because of the many higher-paying positions in diverse careers that have become available to women. Some principals, having difficulty locating someone, have selected the best teacher in the building and have created incentives for that person to become certified as a library media specialist.

EVALUATING THE SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALIST

For a quick gauge of whether the three foundation stones of the library media program are in place, the evaluative form in figure 3.2 can be filled out by each of the library media staff members and combined to form a picture of services

Make one photocopy and one transparency of figure 3.2 for each member of the LMC staff. Have each staff member rate himself or herself on the paper copy of the chart and then, using different colors, transfer these ratings to his or her own transparency. Only the head of the LMC should fill in the percent circles of teacher involvement as an indication of how well the entire staff is reaching the teachers.

Each of the completed transparencies is instructive in and of itself. What role is played by each of the staff members? How do professional and clerical roles compare? Now overlay all of the transparencies. Theoretically, the result should be an entire

rectangle of color. Professional and clerical roles should approximate the model shown in figure 2.1. That is, complementary roles create an entire programmatic structure.

The transparency asks for the percentage of faculty reached at each level of the taxonomy. An alternative would be to chart what percentage of subject departments or grade levels is served on each of the levels.

Library Media Staff Roles

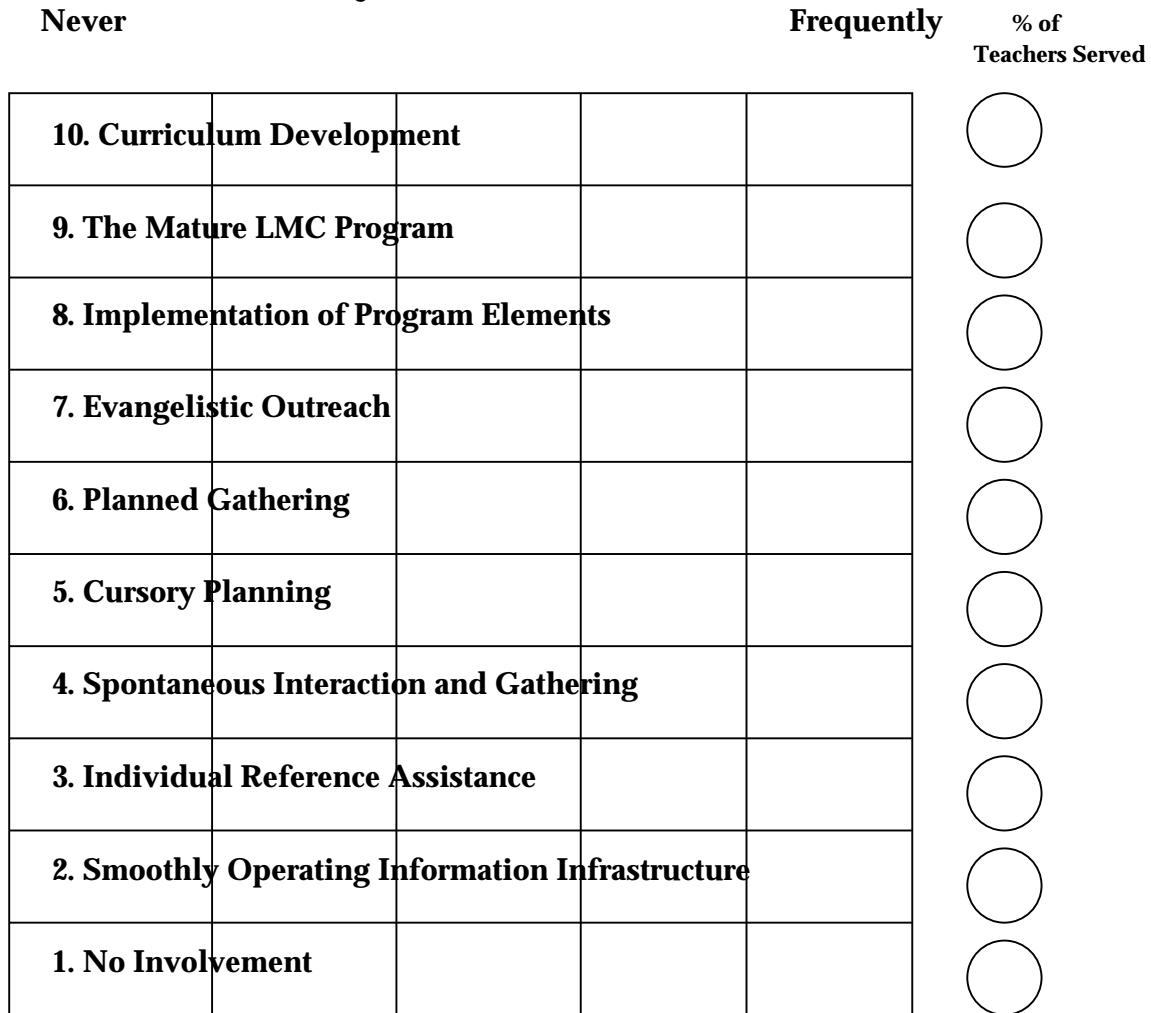


Fig. 3.2. Library media staff roles.

