

Building Evidence Folders for Learning Through Libraries

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The controversy over the 65% Solution underscores the public's perception that school libraries do not provide vital instructional programs. This legislation, which has been enacted in states such as Texas, Kansas and Louisiana, pumps 65 percent of a state's educational budget into direct classroom resources (Toppo 2006). Unfortunately, school library media specialists are classified as non-instructional, support personnel according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). This has led the American Association of School Librarians to produce a position statement on the instructional classification of school library media specialists (<http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslproftools/positionstatements/instclass.htm>) in hopes of including certified library media specialists as part of the NCES "instruction" classification.

Even without the 65% Solution, however, library media programs are frequently on the chopping block when school budgets shrink. A principal in that predicament recently told me, "I would love to keep my librarian but I have to consider my priorities. I need to retain the positions and programs that show my students are actually learning." Indeed!

When building level administrators and school advisory councils meet to wrangle over budgets, they seek to support programs that demonstrate positive student growth in areas of high need. The big question is: As a library media specialist, are you able to produce this type of evidence? While many library media specialists spend a major portion of their week engaged in instructional activities, the impact of their teaching is often invisible (Harada and Yoshina 2006). The following are critical questions that library media specialists must wrestle with:

- How does your library media center support student learning?
- What compelling evidence do you have that students have achieved the learning targets?

For library media specialists, who have been comfortable with traditional forms of reporting, responses to the above questions require a dramatic paradigm shift from an *object-oriented approach* to a *student-oriented approach* to assessment and evaluation. The object-oriented approach centers on evaluation reports that include statistical counting of "things" such as new acquisitions, circulation figures, and numbers of instructional sessions and planning meetings. The student-oriented approach focuses on assessment of student performance. It involves not only what students learn but also the degree to which student learning is demonstrated (Harada and Yoshina 2005).

The Hawaii Experiment

Library media specialists in Hawaii, like many of their colleagues elsewhere in the nation, are exploring ways to design and implement this type of student-oriented assessment. As one elementary library media specialist stated:

I teach at least four classes a day but I haven't really addressed the issue of assessment. I informally eyeball what the kids are doing as I circulate among

them but that's about it. I am now realizing this is not enough. At the last faculty meeting, my principal asked all of the faculty to focus on evidence of student learning. I sat there thinking: I know I have been doing a good job of teaching but I also know that I haven't been collecting or communicating evidence of what the kids are actually learning in my library. That is going to be my big challenge this year.

To tackle the issue of assessment in Hawaii's school libraries, twenty-four K-12 library media specialists are currently participating in a pilot project to develop evidence folders. These folders are intended as communication tools with key stakeholder groups in the school community. The data and information included in the folder center on the library's contribution to academic achievement.

This pilot project entitled, "School Librarians Help Students Achieve: Here's the Evidence!" is the collaborative brainchild of the Hawaii Association of School Librarians, the University of Hawaii's Library and Information Science Program, and the Hawaii Department of Education's School Library Services. This year-long professional development initiative incorporates face-to-face sessions and online communication via a listserv and a web site.

The project employs a practice-based approach (Ball and Cohen 1999) that centers on library media specialists using lessons and curricula from their own schools as the artifacts for improvement. In the face-to-face sessions they have opportunities to critique each other's work and offer suggestions for improvement. Using the online tools, they continue the dialogue, exchange ideas, and provide critical support to one another as they strive to create evidence folders for their own school library programs. The rest of this article describes the approach they are taking and the steps involved in constructing these evidence folders.

A Strategic Approach to Assessment

The core of the evidence folder is the synthesis and analysis of student learning that results from library instruction. The library media specialists in Hawaii realize that they cannot formally assess all of the lessons they teach; therefore, they are employing a strategic tactic to assessment (Harada 2005). They begin by asking themselves: What are the most critical learning gaps that my students are facing at this time? How does my teaching support the classroom teachers' efforts to close the gaps? *These questions are essential ones because they force library media specialists to consider the value of what they teach from the perspective of the classroom.*

For all of the Hawaii schools, these gaps are rooted in the mandates of No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education n.d.), and in the state's content and performance standards (Hawaii State Department of Education 2005). At the same time, the library media specialists are prudently taking baby steps in building their evidence folders. In getting started, they have each selected one or two lessons that are clearly aligned with the identified learning gaps in their respective schools.

Through participation in this project, they are aware that effective assessment is not simply a matter of adding a rubric to an existing lesson plan. To build stronger assessment components into the lessons, they have adopted a “backward mapping” strategy (Wiggins and McTighe 1998) that requires an outcome-focused examination of existing instruction. The reflective process involves the following:

- ***Connecting the selected lesson to the state’s content and performance standards.***
This is an important first step because it clearly indicates that the library instruction reinforces the skills and dispositions that the classroom is also trying to achieve.
- ***Stating the learning goal of the selected lesson.***
The learning goal must precisely identify the learner(s) and the specific concept or skill being learned.
- ***Describing the performance task.***
The task answers the question: What must students do to demonstrate their understanding of the learning goal? It describes the task and the desired level of performance.
- ***Creating a tool or strategy to assess the quality of student performance.***
An effective tool allows the student and the instructor to clearly identify what is being learned and determine how well it is being learned. Checklists, rating scales, and rubrics are among the tools used. Graphic organizers, including K-W-L charts, concept maps, and Venn diagrams, are also valuable tools for assessment purposes. For more detailed information on these various instruments, refer to the list of assessment resources at the end of this article.
- ***Compiling and analyzing assessment data.***
The use of a spreadsheet program is one effective way to enter and tabulate assessment scores for a class. Spreadsheets also allow you to merge assessment data from several classes if you are developing a composite profile by grade level or by course. An added advantage of spreadsheets is that you can easily create graphs and charts with the information.
- ***Instructors reflecting on ways to improve their teaching strategies based on assessment data.***
Importantly, the tabulated data helps the library media specialist answer the following questions: What did most of the students learn well? What was problematic for them? Based on the assessment findings, how might I modify my instruction to improve student learning?
- ***Students reflecting on ways to improve their own learning skills.***
A key aspect of assessment is students gaining the confidence and know-how to accurately reflect on their own progress and achievement. By engaging in self-assessment, the students ask themselves the following questions: What did I do well in this lesson? What was hard for me and why? How might I do things differently?

Figures 1, 2 and 3 elaborate on various aspects of an outcome-focused approach to assessment.

[Figure 1]

[Figure 2]

[Figure 3]

Evidence Folders

As mentioned earlier, the selected lessons and resulting student performances form the guts of an evidence folder. It is important to remember that the audiences for the folder are stakeholder groups that influence decision making at the school level, i.e., administrators, school advisory boards, and teaching colleagues. The language used should be jargon-free and clear to non-educators.

Key components of an evidence folder include the following:

- Brief description of how the library's mission connects with the school's mission
- Brief description of school's major learning targets for the school year
- Brief description of how instruction in the library connects with school's learning targets
- Samples of lessons taught in the library that connect with the school's learning targets
- Samples of student work for each lesson included in the folder
- Displays of compiled assessment data that communicate what students learned from these lessons
- Samples of commentary from students about possible future improvements
- Samples of commentary from instructors about possible teaching improvements

Figures 4 and 5 provide tips and suggestions for developing evidence folders.

[Figure 4]

[Figure 5]

Summary

Unlike a portfolio, which is primarily intended for self-assessment, an evidence folder is a way to communicate what students learn through the library to other members of the school community. It can be a paper document; it can also be rendered electronically. The critical message is that libraries contribute directly to student achievement. Assessment, therefore, is not an *incidental* but an *central* part of the process.

Resources for Assessment

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Figure 1: Using an Outcome Based Approach to Assessment

Note: The sample responses below are based on a grade 4 lesson on using the OPAC.

Steps in outcome based approach	Sample responses
1. Connect the selected lesson to the state's content and performance standards.	This lesson is linked directly to a language arts standard: Locating sources –finding age-appropriate resources to complete a research project.
2. Develop clear learning goal.	Fourth grade students will demonstrate their ability to access information by using the OPAC to find resources for their projects.
3. Describe the performance task.	Working individually, a student will use appropriate subject headings in his or her OPAC search to locate at least two resources that are useful for the assignment.
4. Create a tool to assess the quality of student performance.	Students use a graphic organizer that has been developed by the LMS to complete this particular assignment. (Refer to Figure 2)
5. Compile and analyze assessment data.	The LMS uses a spreadsheet to compile data on the class' work. (Refer to Figure 3)
6. Instructors reflect on findings.	Based on the compiled data, the LMS and the classroom teacher decide to differentiate the instruction. Students, who "met" or "exceeded" the requirements, move on with the teacher's assistance and begin gathering information. The LMS confers with students, who "approached" or "did not meet" expectations, to help them with keywords and locational skills.
7. Students reflect on findings.	Students also rate themselves on the assignment. They have an opportunity to write reflective comments about how well they performed.

Figure 2: Graphic Organizer for OPAC Lesson

Subject headings found in OPAC	Titles of resources found with subject headings	Call numbers for resources

I rate my work as follows:

- 4 (Exceeded) = I found more than 2 resources using appropriate subject headings
- 3 (Met) = I found 2 resources using appropriate subject headings
- 2 (Approaching) = I found 1 resource using an appropriate subject heading
- 1 (Not met) = I was not able to find a resource using an appropriate subject heading

Student's comments:

My librarian rates my work as follows:

- 4 (Exceeded) = Student found more than 2 resources using appropriate subject headings
- 3 (Met) = Student found 2 resources using appropriate subject headings
- 2 (Approaching) = Student found 1 resource using an appropriate subject heading
- 1 (Not met) = Student was not able to find a resource using an appropriate subject heading

Librarian's comments:

Figure 3: Grade 4 Class Performance on OPAC Lesson

Student	Exceeded	Met	Approaching	Not Met
Anderson	x			
Bailey		x		
Carson	x			
Davies				x
Emerson		x		
Farantino		x		
Gee		x		
Hong	x			
Lopez		x		
Martinez			x	
O'Reilly			x	
Omura			x	
Thompson	x			
Viloria		x		
Zilonis				x
TOTALS	4	6	3	2

Figure 4: Contents of Evidence Folder

Items to include	Tips and suggestions
Connect library and school mission statements	Include both mission statements. Also include a sentence or two that highlights the link between the two statements.
Identify school's major learning targets for the upcoming school year	This is crucial because you want to focus on the most critical priorities facing the school.
Connect library instruction with school's learning targets	You want to select a few lessons that directly align with the school's teaching and learning priorities. You don't have the time and resources to formally assess everything that you teach, so you need to focus on what counts for the school.
Provide samples of student performance	Select two or three samples of student work for each lesson that you include in your evidence folder. For the OPAC lesson described in this article, you might include completed samples of the graphic organizer.
Create a display of compiled assessment	Use of spreadsheet programs allow you to quickly create visual displays of the data. For the OPAC lesson with the grade 4 students, you might show the results in a bar graph. (See Figure 5)
Provide sample reflections from students	Student reflections allow the stakeholder to read what students have to say about what they did well and how they might improve.
Provide sample commentary from instructors about possible teaching modifications	This is an opportunity to share how you and the classroom teacher used the assessment data to adjust and differentiate instruction.

Figure 5. Grade 4 Class Results for OPAC Lesson

