The Power to Restructure:
Meeting the Challenge of Change for School Media Coordinators

by Lynda B. Fowler

For many years I have kept a file labeled "Media Profession — Thoughts On." The file contains scribbled notes of my thoughts, quotations from articles and speeches, and complete articles that have particular meaning for me as a school library media professional. Recently, as I surveyed the contents of this file, I found that all the items address the issue of change in education and how the library media profession relates to change and the restructuring process. My collection suggests that school library media coordinators have not been influential in this change process. It is frightening to realize that our profession is almost non-existent in what is perhaps the most exciting and revolutionary time in modern education.

A headline from *DSMS Update*, a newsletter published by the Division of School Media Specialists, AECT, reads "Media Specialists in Jeopardy?"[1] This article notes that Michigan's revision of accreditation standards shall not include specific language delineating the need for school library media specialists in any school in Michigan. Daniel Barron, in an article from *School Library Activities Monthly*, asks is our "program perceived to be essential to the daily operation of the school and the realization of its mission?"[2] A quote from Kenneth Haycock reads: "There is relatively little danger to the continued existence of school libraries. The issue is the continued existence of the school librarian."[3] Again Haycock, in a keynote address to a conference of the International Association of School Librarians, notes that few administrators, teachers, or students view the school library media center as part of the instructional process.[4]

Several of my own musings in the folder ask questions about the perception of school library media coordinators. One question was generated after a discussion about several high tech schools in Minnesota. After hearing about the advanced technology, exploratory learning, and other strategies used in the schools, I was told that the school librarians play little or no role in this exciting and productive instructional situation. My question was and is, "Why and how did this happen?" What message does this send to the administrators, teachers, and other visitors to these highly successful and innovative schools? Another why-and-how-did-this-happen question was recorded after reading about Chris Whittle's plan to design for-profit, technical, state-of-the-art schools. His planning committee of highly-regarded, very influential people does not include a library, media, or information specialist. Are we to believe that state-of-the-art schools can be created and can exist without the contributions of these professionals?

In 1991, another handwritten note acknowledged the loss of seven district-level library media supervisor positions across North Carolina. The same note continues: "How many school library media coordinator positions were added with Basic Education Program funds?" Checking with the Division of Media and Technology, I found that very few BEP support positions were used for media coordinators. I also discovered that of these positions used for media, the majority were added to give schools minimal library media services or to supplant locally-funded positions. Only a few of these positions were used to increase library media services to students and teachers. Currently very few schools in North Carolina meet the BEP standard of one library media coordinator for every four hundred students.

A review of major educational reforms, beginning with *A Nation At Risk* in 1983, demonstrates how educators, politicians, and business and industry leaders perceive the school library media center. Very little,

if any, reference is made to the school library media program or school library media coordinator in any of these documents. We have all read about effective schools, school-based management, and other reform and restructuring efforts in the past several years. How many references have you seen to the school library media center—even when the writings involve information literacy? How did we allow ourselves and our profession to become so lacking in influence and so nonessential that articles can be written about the information age and the need for students to learn how to use information and not mention the library media center or the library media coordinator?

During a period in which the public is demanding substantial educational reform and local administrators are responding to these demands, we must accept the fact

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that our profession is not having a significant impact on educational reform. We must decide what we can do to change in order to be worthy contributors to the reform process and, in turn, gain respect for our profession. We must realize that as education undertakes the improvement, restructuring process, we cannot sit idly by. We must be well prepared and willing to meet the challenge of reform. We must be able to define, defend, and prove our willingness to be a part of and to make a difference in all the issues involved in the process.

A crisis is defined as "an unstable or

crucial time or state of affairs whose outcome will make a decisive difference for better or worse."[5] Indications are that school librarianship is in a state of crisis. We have the power to determine if the crisis is to have a positive or negative outcome. That power lies in our willingness to acknowledge and examine our present status, to determine the factors that have contributed to this crucial situation, and to make a commitment to change.

A review of the literature combined with my personal thoughts leads me to propose that much of our present situation can be attributed to a lack of the following: positive image, distinct role clarification, strong partnerships with other educators, viable planning and assessment components in our programs, and direct identity with national, state, and local educational reform initiatives.

Our *image*, a battle the profession has addressed for years, is one reason we find ourselves in an unstable time. We are often faced with negative perceptions. The possible reason for the problematic image comes from the fact that few teachers and administrators understand the "library" parts of our work and tend to associate a single image of keeper of books with the job title, even when we demonstrate many skills beyond that role. Placing sole responsibility on uninformed outsiders is no longer an acceptable excuse for the image problem of school library media coordinators. Research conducted by Kenneth Tewel and Carol Kroll " supports the perception that library media specialists still consistently place higher value on the managerial aspects of their jobs than on the cooperative planning and teaching function."[6] What message are we sending to members of the school community when we place primary importance on the functions of organization, management, acquisition, and dissemination? Granted, the managerial tasks are important to an efficient program, but do we hide behind the familiar and comfortable parts of our jobs? Do we use these tasks as a way to avoid the less comfortable and less concrete and more demanding aspects of our responsibilities? Are we deceiving ourselves by thinking we are real contributors to our school's mission by performing organizational tasks day in and day out? Do our daily routines reinforce the perceived image of book keeper?

Are we viewed by our principal or supervisor as someone always available because we don't have responsibility for a class; as someone to provide a planning time for teachers; as a teacher of "library skills"? Does the superintendent vow that school library media centers are essential, but fail to include us on curriculum com-

mittees, reform committees, or other important improvement task forces? Are decisions made about resources without consulting the very person trained in resource selection? Are reading lists formulated without our input? When these and other all-too-familiar events occur, we should stop and ask why. The real answer might lie both in our perceived image and our unwillingness to participate.

Daniel Barron, in an article entitled "Research and the National Goals" quotes from Patsy Perritt and Kathleen Heim. They conclude that "Personal skills seem to be the strongest predictor of success."[7] In the same article Barron quotes from Kenneth Haycock's *Research about Teaching and Learning through the School's Library Resource Center*: "School library media specialists who are less cautious and more extroverted tend to be more successful."[8] In order to be successful, each of us must assume responsibility for improving our personal skills. We can no longer sit back and complain. We must ask ourselves if our image is an obstacle in promoting a new view of the school library media center and of the library media coordinator, and then seek ways to create assertively an image that extends beyond that of the keeper of books.

Lack of *role clarification* leaves us unsure of who we are, how to act, and what to do. For the past several years we have been faced with changes in the educational process in addition to the changes in librarianship. We have been asked to deal with computers, the use and production of multimedia, distance learning by satellite, online searching and other forms of telecommunications, electronic reference sources, whole-language instruction, school-based management, interdisciplinary units, cooperative learning, etc., etc. Some of us have tried to address all of the initiatives and extended ourselves too far. Others have retreated because we knew we couldn't do and be all things. Only a few have been able to examine the initiatives, establish priorities, consider management of professional time, eliminate some practices, and continue to have a progressive and effective library media program.

For role clarification, our focus must be on *Information Power*. Our mission is "to insure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information."[9] We accomplish this by providing intellectual and physical access to materials in all formats; by providing instruction to foster competence and stimulate interest in reading, viewing, and using information and ideas; by working with other educators to design learning strategies to meet the needs of individual students; and by fulfilling our roles as information specialist, teacher,

and instructional consultant.[10] The more we become involved in change and reform, the more relevant and useful and powerful this document becomes. The initial reading of *Information Power* may have left you with a need for more specific information, more numbers and statistics, and clearer guidelines. We now find, upon close examination, that *Information Power* is an indispensable guide in helping us focus on the important issues of library media programs and reform and put our responsibilities in perspective with the roles we must perform as library media coordinators and as members of the school faculty. Linda Waddle, a school library media specialist, suggests, "Those who reject the roles recommended in *Information Power* no longer belong in the school library media profession."[11] A profound and perhaps unsettling statement, but one that each of us should examine closely. We should question our personal beliefs concerning our roles as information specialist, teacher, and instructional consultant and determine if our acceptance level of these roles qualifies us for membership in the school library media profession. We can decide to take charge of clearly defining our roles and demonstrating, through our every action, these roles to students, faculty, and administration.

A clear, concise role definition will lead to a better understanding of our position within the instructional process. Tewel and Kroll conclude that

> before media specialists can function in a teaching role, they must be involved in the curriculum. But before that can happen, the media specialist must have a self-image of, and be viewed by others, as being an integral part of the instructional process. Simply stated, school library media specialists must perceive themselves as full-fledged faculty members before change can take place.[12]

A thorough knowledge of the curriculum, of research on various teaching strategies, of resource-based instruction, and of other instructional issues is essential to being an integral part of the instructional process.

Direct involvement with instruction is also essential. Daniel Barron classifies involvement of library media coordinators into two categories: "Passive means that the media specialist maintains a warehouse, waiting for someone to come by. Active means that the media specialist goes out to find out what people want and need, locates materials, then helps people to use them."[13] Why have we chosen to be passive and reactive in the instructional

process? Nothing in our training and background has given us the right or privilege to be on the sidelines of instructional decisions. How can researchers Tewel and Kroll be "shocked to discover that few of the media specialists surveyed wrote or spoke of integrating the library media program into the curriculum of the school"?[14] Our positions within a school cannot be justified if we are not an integral part of the instructional process. Our integrity should not allow us to be seen as non-contributors with little connection to the whole. Marilyn Miller contends that, "The survival of library media specialists as a viable part of the instructional system depends on their developing programs and services that become learning intensive."[15] Under close examination, do our programs and services meet this criterion?

The revision of the North Carolina public school curriculum, in progress, offers library media coordinators an excellent opportunity to become fully entrenched in the instructional process. The revised curriculum is more focused on process, employs more critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and requires more exploratory learning. According to the findings of Kathleen Carver, "a library offers a natural setting to employ critical thinking skills with students" and "serves as an excellent lab for applying various methods and techniques of critical thinking instruction."[16] The past indicates that we have not fulfilled our role in the instructional process. If we are to expect a positive outcome from the present, we must be prepared to assist teachers in implementing this new curriculum. David Loertscher's *Taxonomies of a School Media Program* is a helpful tool for accomplishing this task. Knowing and understanding his eleven levels of instructional involvement should be on the priority list of every library media coordinator; and, functioning at the interactive level should be a major goal.[17]

Knowledge of the curriculum and direct involvement in instruction must be teamed with the establishment of **strong partnerships** in order to develop an effective library media program. The lack of strong partnerships has led to misunderstanding about our role within the school and has lessened the support needed from teachers and administration. Michael Bell and Herman Totten conclude that

> Library media professionals must take steps to understand better how the characteristics of teachers, library media specialist, and the organization itself interact to facilitate or hinder cooperation between the library media center and the classroom. A better

understanding of these factors should result in library media specialists who work with other school staff to make a richer contribution to the instructional program of the school.[18]

Have we studied our organizational structure and the characteristics of the staff well enough to determine how we can best establish and develop strong working relationships with teachers? What conditions do we establish that encourage teachers to form partnerships with us? What positive results can teachers recognize as a result of their partnership with us? Research indicates that more cooperation, less isolation, more intellectual sharing and collegial work arrangements are common elements in effective schools.[19] Would our programs be rated effective if evaluated on these criteria?

Tewel and Kroll also found that there exists

> a series of common institution impediments to improved relationships between media specialists and others in the school. These include the media specialists' lack of awareness of the school's educational program and of their role as curriculum specialists, their infrequent contact with classroom teachers, and their defensiveness about the importance of the library media program.[20]

Are we willing to accept the challenge of demonstrating the importance of our program rather than talking about it? Miller believes that "The school library media center program that moves into the mainstream of the instructional program in the coming years will focus on knowledge of how learners learn and the development of teaching partnerships with classroom teachers."[21] How strong and productive are our partnerships with teachers? Can successful teaching occur without us?

A **strong planning and assessment component** is missing from many of our programs. We cannot respond to accountability issues without this component. *Learning Connections: Guidelines for Media and Technology Programs* stresses the importance of planning and assessment and provides direction for the development of this component. It states that

> Although assessment is an important means of measuring effectiveness, it also provides the impetus for planning the services and functions necessary for media and technology programs to strengthen the overall program of the school. To cope with the climate of

change related to school reform, a systematic means of program design and evaluation is needed. Planning and assessment are essential to school improvement because they provide the framework for translating the mission of the school into desired outcomes.[22]

Are systematic planning and evaluation part of our yearly routine? Have we identified the best model to use for our program planning and assessment? A mission statement, combined with the goals and objectives that drive our program, is an essential prevention against operating on a whatever-comes-our-way basis. Our plans should be substantive and relate directly to the school and system-level plans. We, along with our administrators, should use our plan and assessment information as a legitimate evaluation instrument and make future plans based on the results. We must be truly accountable for our program within the context of our school mission.

Many of us experience difficulty in articulating a **direct identity with national, state, and local school goals and reform initiatives**. In an article entitled "The National Goals Revisited" Daniel Barron encourages us to "develop strategies and activities to show how we fit into the national goals and how schools cannot meet them without us."[23] Barron includes a copy of the position paper prepared by the American Association of School Librarians on how the national goals can be implemented through school library media programs and he encourages each state, district, and school to formulate a similar statement.

Specific requirements come with all educational reform models. Have you identified how you and your library media program can support your school and school system in meeting the requirements of School Improvement/Senate Bill 2? Are you aware of opportunities and responsibilities in reaching the goals of the school and school system? We must not only be able to identify, but also articulate how and demonstrate what we do daily, weekly, and yearly in support of these goals and requirements. Perhaps a standard question to ask before undertaking a task is, "How does this relate to the school goals?" Whatever we do in support of school and system-level goals will be a positive move toward ensuring that the outcome of our crisis is positive.

School-based management is a reform agenda item that cannot be ignored by library media professionals. An ERIC search conducted by Daniel Barron found five hundred citations on school-based man-

agement and not one included reference to school libraries with the exception of one article that he had written.[24] Barron encourages us to investigate

> what school-based management means in terms of how we can be more effective participants, what some of the potential benefits and dangers to our programs are, what the challenges may be, and some resources to help us and our school begin the process of school-based management.[25]

Why do the references not mention library media centers and coordinators? Perhaps the developers and researchers were influenced by our long-standing image or perhaps we were too passive during the development. Whatever the answer, we must be active participants in the process by becoming informed, by providing resources to the administration and faculty, and by ensuring that our program is perceived as an essential element of the school. A true school-based management model gives a school the right to make personnel decisions. When your school reaches that degree of management, will it elect to maintain the library media coordinator position?

Most schools are embracing resource-based teaching as a means to meet goals dealing with increased student achievement. Teachers are encouraged to teach the curriculum, not the textbook, using a variety of resources and multiple instructional methods. According to Loertscher, requirements for successful resource-based teaching are

> a teacher who is willing to use a wide variety of media, a well-stocked library media center, and a professional library media specialist who is willing to be a partner with the teacher in lesson/unit/research planning. The library media specialist serves as the materials and technology expert, the teacher serves as the content expert, and both draw upon the resources of the center to execute a joint teaching plan.[26]

This implies that there is an available collection of various media formats directly related to the curriculum.

Collection development is an area of our responsibility with which we should be very comfortable. We learned about it in our professional training and it still remains a top priority, basically unchanged by developments in education reform. Yet, many of our collections cannot support true resource-based instruction. If there were no textbooks, how much of the curriculum could be taught with our present collections? Lack of funds is not an acceptable excuse. We must examine how well we expend the funds we do receive and what level of impact we have on the total school budget. Do we keep teachers and administrators informed; do we prepare lesson or unit resource bibliographies for teachers; do we prepare lists of evaluated materials that support the curriculum to share with faculty as possible purchases? More importantly, we need to understand the concept of resource-based instruction and assist and support teachers as they adapt. Do our professional shelves have books and articles on the topic? Do we share information and offer support to teachers and the administration? Successful resource-based teaching depends on quality resources and strong support from the library media program.

These and other causes contribute to the present status of school librarianship; but we can no longer use them as excuses. We must be willing to accept our position, overcome the fear of doing the unfamiliar, and commit to a different agenda. The 1990s is the decade of change in education. The components of change and restructuring provide library media coordinators with a window of opportunity to restructure our roles and our image. At no other time in education have we had so much power to change and influence. Whether we do may not only affect our position within the educational process, but our very existence. The power and choice to restructure are ours.

Change is not easy. It requires total commitment, hard work, time, and an acceptance that what we have always done may not be what we need to do in the future. You don't have to be sick to get better is a phrase we hear frequently in discussions about change. An exemplary library media program in the 1980s will not be appropriate for the 1990s. Whether our programs have been rated excellent, fair, or poor, we all need to re-examine what we are doing and prepare for change.

Following the publication of *Information Power* in 1988 and the headline-making emphasis on educational structure and reform, there have been many articles and books have been written on what and how library media coordinators can and should do. And yet this emphasis has not produced an overall change in library media programs. According to Barbara Stripling this will not occur until each of us decides

> to make a commitment to change a functioning library media program . . . We can be encouraged by the fact that none of us is responsible for changing any program but our own. The summed effect of individual changes will engender change on the (local, state) and national level.[27]

Each library media coordinator's actions make a difference in the profession as a whole. We cannot depend on other coordinators to attack our individual crisis. Each of us must make a total commitment to accept the challenge of change and restructure our individual image and our roles if we are to expect a positive future for the school library media program and school library media coordinator.

Just as school-based management extends the right and responsibility for improvement to an individual school, the right and responsibility for program improvement lie with the individual library media coordinator. An individual school is held accountable to the school system and to the state. We are held accountable to the school and to our profession.

How we approach restructuring is an individual decision. However, the following are offered as suggestions for all of us to consider as a beginning:

- Reread and internalize *Information Power*
- Identify and read research on the school media program and use the information to guide practices
- Be informed about and involved in school improvement initiatives
- Prepare for and accept change.
- Read and study the following:
  Curriculum Initiative: An Agenda and Strategy for Library Media Program, by Michael B. Eisenberg and Robert E. Berkowitz (Ablex Publishing, 1988)
  Helping Teachers Teach, by Philip Turner (Libraries Unlimited, 1988)
  The School Library Program in the Curriculum, by Kenneth Haycock (Libraries Unlimited, 1990)
  Taxonomies of the School Library Media Program, by David Loertscher (Libraries Unlimited, 1988)
- Prepare meaningful plans that are undeniably linked to student learning following the guidelines in *Learning Connections*
- Write a Professional Development Plan that reflects efforts for substantial change
- Act quickly but thoughtfully
- Reach out to others for assistance
- Approach the process with a smile, knowing that you are doing something for your profession, but more importantly that you are contributing to the mission and goals of your school and school system and in turn making a difference for boys and girls.

In "Rethinking the School Library: A Practitioner's Perspective" Barbara Stripling states that the "mandate for change is from society. The power for change is in the individual."[28] As school library media coordinators, we possess the power to restructure our image, our role, and our program. Whether or not we choose to be a valuable part of the change process in our school is up to us. Ralph L. Peterson in *A Place for Caring and Celebration: The School Media Center* tells us that the "media center and what happens in it and how it happens is a reflection of you. You are the person in charge and what results is representative of your spirit, imagination, and ability."[29] Others will not solve the crisis issues in school librarianship; only we can determine if the outcomes will be negative or positive. The power to change is ours. Will we accept the challenge? Will I soon add an item to my "Media Profession — Thoughts On" file that reads "North Carolina Media Coordinators in Jeopardy?" or will I add a headline that reads "North Carolina Media Coordinators Are Making a Difference!"?

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[2]Daniel Barron, "School-Based Management and School Library Media Specialists," *School Library Media Activities Monthly* 8 (February 1992): 49.

[3]Handouts from a workshop presented by Frank Winstead in which he quotes Kenneth Haycock in *Emergency Librarian*. Quote taken from *The Instructional Consultant Role of the School Library Media Specialist: A Research Study* by Patricia White Pickard, p.73.

[4]Michael Bell and Herman L. Totten, "Cooperation in Instruction Between Classroom Teachers and School Library Media Specialists," *School Library Media Quarterly* 20 (Winter 1992): 80.

[5]*Websters's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts: G.&C. Merriam Company, 1979), 267.

[6]Kenneth J. Tewel and Carol Kroll, "Empowerment for the School Library Media Specialist: Moving from Reactive to Proactive," *School Library Media Quarterly* (Summer 1988): 245.

[7]Daniel Barron, "Research and the National Goals," *School Library Media Activities Monthly* 8 (October 1991): 49.

[8]Ibid., 48.

[9]American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technology, *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1988),1.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Linda Waddle, "School Media Matters," *Wilson Library Bulletin* (October 1988): 66.

[12]Tewel and Kroll, 246.

[13]Daniel Barron, "Communicating What School Library Media Specialists Do: The Evaluation Process," *School Library Journal* (March 1987): 97.

[14]Tewel and Kroll, 245.

[15]Marilyn Miller, "The Birth of the Electronically Smart Media Center," *Media and Methods* (November/December 1991): 77.

[16]Barron, "Research and the National Goals," 49.

[17]David Loertscher, *Taxonomies of the School Library Media Program* (Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1988).

[18]Bell and Totten, 84.

[19]Ibid., 80.

[20]Tewel and Kroll, 246.

[21]Miller, 77.

[22]*Learning Connections: Guidelines for Media and Technology Programs*, Division of Media and Technology Services, (Raleigh, North Carolina: Department of Public Instruction, 1992), 27.

[23]Daniel Barron, "The National Goals Revisited," *School Library Media Activities Monthly* 8 (September 1991): 47.

[24]Barron, "School-Based Management and School Library Media Specialists," 47.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Loertscher, 60.

[27]Barbara K. Stripling, "Rethinking the School Library: A Practitioner's Perspective," *School Library Media Quarterly* (Spring 1989): 139.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ralph L. Peterson, *A Place for Caring and Celebration: The School Media Center* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1979), 31.

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