A Matrix for School Librarians: Aligning Standards, Inquiry, Reading, and Instruction

by JUDI MOREILLON

When new initiatives such as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (http://corestandards.org) are being launched, it is imperative that school librarians get “out in front” as part of the decision-making team. Aligning library work with classroom teachers’ requirements is essential to ensuring that the expertise of the school librarian and the resources of the school library are integrated into the classroom curriculum. With the proliferation of standards, it is also important for school librarians to continue to focus on library values and responsibilities that help optimize students’ learning experiences in the 21st Century.

STUDENT LEARNING

Within CCSS there is an emphasis on the inquiry learning process and reading comprehension, both of which are integral to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) Standards for the 21st-Century Learner (2007). The alignment matrix (see pages 30-31) provides school library professionals with a framework for the CCSS and AASL standards, the inquiry process, and reading comprehension strategy instruction, along with sample applications to support student learning.

It is important to start with standards when coplanning a lesson or unit of study with classroom teachers and specialists. Effective instructional design begins with determining student learning outcomes (Wiggins and McTighe 2005). “Backward planning” requires that educators first determine learning objectives based on curriculum standards and on pretests, student inventories and reporting, teacher observation, standardized test results, or other data. Before educators can develop the learning tasks and the criteria on which student work will be assessed, they must have the end in mind. In addition, the backward design framework is ideal for gathering evidence to document the impact of classroom-library collaborative instruction on student learning.

SETTING OBJECTIVES AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK

Results of a 2010 McREL study showed that setting objectives and providing feedback had a positive effect on student achievement on standardized tests—percentile gains of 12 points for setting objectives and 28 points for providing feedback (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, and Stone 2012, 3-4). Setting objectives for learning is important because they serve as guideposts for students. Objectives help students determine how to focus their attention so that they meet expectations for the learning event. Learners also use objectives as they self-assess their process as well as final products (self-assessment is a strand in the AASL Standards for the 21st-Century Learner). Objectives guide the work of educators as well. By referring back to the objectives throughout the planning and implementation stages, educators can evaluate whether or not their input, presentation, and modeling and the students’ learning tasks are aligned in order for students to achieve the desired outcomes; they can adjust their teaching accordingly.

Objectives are also important in determining the kinds of feedback students need during guided and independent practice. As students and educators monitor the learning process, they refer back to the lesson objectives to identify gaps in understanding, assess comprehension of the tasks at hand, and determine progress toward reaching outcomes. When learners require support in any of these areas, educators can provide targeted feedback and interventions throughout the process. Objectives are the common language shared by learners and educators that make instruction comprehensible.

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