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Assessment and Measured Outcomes

“What’s measured improves”
—Peter Drucker

WHAT’S MEASURED IMPROVES. BUT WHY? Is it because we know more about something because it was measured and, therefore, we can adjust as needed to get it just right? Is it because we care enough about a subject to create an assessment for it? Is it the measuring or the reflection the measuring forces what matters? It might be that all these things are true. Assessment, or measuring something, is a key component of teaching and learning in K-12 schools and should also be reconsidered as a key component of the teaching, learning and programming that takes place in school libraries.

Common frustrations of school librarians and teachers are the ideas that we are teaching to the test, spending more time testing than instructing, choosing standardized testing over authentic learning opportunities, etc. In some cases, these frustrations could be valid. But if used

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appropriately within the teaching and learning cycle, assessments are essential. How do we know that teaching and learning is successful if we don't measure it?

Not all assessments are the standardized, nationally normed variety. Assessments can be small and unobtrusive and help practitioners reflect on their own craft. In fact, reflective school librarians are assessing all the time, every day. Did the book I promoted lead to students reading? Did the professional development session I offered inspire teachers to try a new digital tool? Did my programming lead to more students visiting the library? These are all examples of ways effective school librarians measure their successes.

Effective school librarians are master teachers. They understand the process of planning for instruction, delivering instruction and then evaluating whether students learned what they had hoped. In a school library, this looks slightly different than in a conventional classroom. I would contend that the design process we use in school library makerspaces includes assessment as does the conversation with a reader upon returning a book. As school librarians, we need to "shift the context of assessment from product to process," as Elizabeth Burns states in the featured article for this issue of *Knowledge Quest*. Like the iterative design process used in makerspaces, the inquiry process and instructional design, informal and/or formal assessment should be a part of every school librarian's interaction with teachers and students. The four articles written for this issue provide guidance in how to do so.

School Libraries and Assessment:

Elizabeth Burns, this issue's content expert opens with an introduction to the topic of assessment in school libraries. School librarians, she reports, often explain that assessment is not something they do. However, the more time she spends with them in their programs, the more assessment opportunities she identifies. She discovered that most school librarians *do* readily incorporate formative assessment practices into their daily lessons, even if they do not explicitly identify them as assessments. According to her work, it is a misunderstood part of the role.

Required standardized testing has led to the belief that traditional grades and testing are the only form of assessment. Burns urges school librarians to reconsider this negative connotation in a school library setting. Many traditional

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assessments measure discrete, objective facts and do not always focus on skills or products. Assessment practices in school libraries could highlight learner progress toward measuring competencies aligned to real-world, information seeking behaviors.

Burns then provides a brief history of assessment in school librarianship and shares a general overview of the types of assessment: diagnostic, formative and summative. She ends by explaining that data from varied types of assessments "can be used to assess the overall strengths of the library program and showcase successes to other stakeholders. It is essential to measure growth at the learner level, then use this data to assess and evaluate library program achievements."

AI in Assessment

Educators and school districts across the country are working to determine the best and highest use of AI in schools. Using AI in assessment is one such positive use, even if it does have limitations. Data, created by humans, has bias. However, AI engines driven by computer code ensures that this inherent bias isn't also compounded by unconscious bias. More ideas exploring the implications of using AI in assessment are shared by IdaMae Craddock in her article of the same title.

Craddock explains that we often use the terms "grading" and "assessing" interchangeably. She explains that grading is for the learner and assessment is for the classroom teacher and for the program. AI can be helpful when viewing the terms from either lens. Specific examples of how AI can be used for grading assignments based on criteria are shared as are considerations for this use.

Craddock ends the essay by summarizing how AI can be a powerful asset in a school library program. Assessment data is central to the ability to

modify instruction, revise products, and innovate practices. These processes are all more effective when using digital tools like AI to do so.

The Power of a Library Learning Commons: Cultivating a Culture of Inquiry, Innovation and Belonging

In their article “The Power of a Library Learning Commons: Cultivating a Culture of Inquiry, Innovation and Belonging,” Kristina A. Holzweiss, J. Trisha Sergi, and Dr. Sarah E. Wasser explain how they use assessment to keep their learning commons innovative and supportive of student inquiry. They share their journey to becoming an essential part of their school. Purposeful planning and reflective assessment allowed them to adjust as needed to meet the needs of their learners.

Assessment and evaluation can be measured using qualitative measures. Talking to patrons and administrators often leads to reflection and adjustment. Including learners and classroom teachers in conversation about the learning commons led to a continuous feedback loop of innovation and adjustment. The librarians themselves were at the heart of the growth and improvement. “The continuous assessment of our program using a variety of national frameworks, standards, and models is the foundation to the remarkable transformation of our program, but it has not occurred in isolation; it was the result of a collective effort.”

This article also contains an explanation of how the team utilized a variety of national frameworks, standards and models as a foundation for their work and the specific adjustments they made because of their collective action research and subsequent action plans driven by this information.

Finally, they share how this reflective work also serves as an advocacy tool. Great programs speak for themselves with demonstrated success.

How Can We Be Sure? Reflective Practice, Self-Assessment, and Evidence of Impact

Susan D. Ballard and Sara Kelly Johns open their article by declaring themselves in a state of perpetual beta, acknowledging that they “have benefited from the perspective of years of practice seasoned by ongoing reflection, self-assessment, and a commitment to continuous growth.” Evolution comes with constant assessment.

In their article, Ballard and Kelly Johns share insight found in their newly published book titled *Elevating the School Library: Building Positive Perceptions through Brand Behavior*. The personal image of the school librarian is not the same as the school library’s brand behavior. Brand credibility is built over time and with every interaction. This does not happen without reflective practice and evaluation of one’s program against an ideal. In our field, we are lucky to have professional organizations and academics to help create these ideals. The American Association of School Librarians National Standards are chief on this list. Brand credibility is closely tied to staying relevant and connecting our work with the vision and mission of our schools in addition to these national standards.

Types of assessment summarized in their article are as follows: self-assessment, achievement data that demonstrates achievement as a result of library instruction, user-based, and a portfolio of artifacts highlighting evidence-based practice. Explanations of each type of assessment are provided and ready to be implemented.

Effective school librarians are master teachers. They understand the process of planning for instruction, delivering instruction and then evaluating whether students learned what they had hoped. We hope you find this issue as helpful in the process as we do.



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