

Public Abstract

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Title:PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS RELATED TO SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA PROGRAMS AFTER PARTICIPATING IN AN ONLINE COURSE, SCHOOL LIBRARY ADVOCACY FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Despite the existence of standards and readily available resources for guiding the development of school library media programs, many school administrators still do not know that these resources and standards exist, and, consequently, do not know the purpose of school library programs (Oâ€™TMNeal, 2004). This mixed methods study examines the experiences of two groups of administrators who participated in the online course, "School Library Advocacy for Administrators," respectively, in the summer of 2005 and the fall of 2006. The course was offered through Mansfield University in Mansfield, Pennsylvania. It was developed to educate administrators about school library media programs and the role of the library media specialist, and to subsequently create administrative advocates for school libraries. The purpose of this study is to explore how these administrators perceive that the course made a difference in what they know about school library media programs and how the information impacted their perspectives and actions in relationship to the library media programs in their buildings. The Mansfield online course offers a unique solution to a long existing problem. There are no other solutions of this nature that emerge in the review of the literature. This study, based on the experiences shared by the participants, will help determine if such a course is a viable solution to successfully informing school administrators about school library media programs. Employing a mixed methods approach, this study makes use of standardized responses from surveys, action plans, feedback sheets and demographic information. In addition, it uses descriptive/phenomenological methods to examine the lived experiences of the participants through interviews. Participantsâ€™TM perceptions, shared through semi-structured interviews, are the result of their individual interpretations of the meanings assigned to events and to acquired knowledge. The interviews show how participants make meaning of their experiences related to a Mansfield University online course and how they put the resulting action plans to work. Findings indicate that the Mansfield University online course provides an impetus for participating administrators to change their perceptions toward library media programs and make changes in their school library programs to some degree. Based on these findings, the Mansfield online course appears to offer a viable solution for informing educational administrators about school library programs. It also provides an avenue for filling a gap that exists in university level educational administration coursework. The findings of the study provide insight from the perspective of the school administrators about what they knew or didnâ€™TMt know about school libraries as they began the online course and after taking it. It provides access to their opinions regarding their role, the role of the library media specialist, and others in developing and sustaining successful programs. It confirms the importance of background knowledge about school libraries and how that information helps administrators take informed action or make educated changes for school library programs. The study also provides library media specialists with insights into the perspectives of school administrators and the challenges that face them when dealing with library media programs. It helps define expectations that administrators have for library media specialists.