

DISCOVERING THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOL LIBRARY WORK

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ABSTRACT

The research examines how school library work is socially organized and how social organization affects cooperation with teachers and others in the school. The researcher uses the institutional ethnography frame of inquiry, providing a way of looking at the role and function of the school librarian/ school media specialist as socially-organized and institutionally-oriented. Using ethnographic data gathering techniques of interviews, participant-observation, and textual analysis in a middle school in the Midwestern United States, the researcher describes social organization of school library work in the categories of collaboration, technology, and access. Viewing school library work through the institutional ethnography frame of reference reveals how powerless media specialists and teachers can be—how the structures that are supposed to make the non-instructional and disciplinary parts of their work easier consume their time and affect their interactions with students.

In an apparently uncertain economic climate, where libraries face closure due to state, city, and school district budget problems the existence of a library in the school becomes even more vital, both to provide access to information to young people and to keep the ideal of the library present in their experience. The visibility of the library and the librarian is also vital. People who make decisions about funding need to know who the librarian is and what he or she contributes. Institutional ethnography shows people where the work is, especially the work that

is not recognized in the official institutional discourse. With the knowledge of how the work is shaped, school librarians can get a clearer view of how to work within the institution to achieve the goals of librarianship: providing physical and intellectual access to information.