An Unlikely Partnership Between School Librarian and School Counselor

Article

by Graeme Boyd, April 2020

The collaborative relationship between the school counselor and the school librarian has for the most part been vastly overlooked within international schools. Both these positions are pivotal for a successful learning environment but are often viewed as separate roles within their own departments.

In the Primary library department at Berlin Brandenburg International School we have been working with the school counselor on a short monthly library session exploring central themes related to wellbeing, feelings, emotions, interpersonal skills, relationships with others, and attributes of the International Baccalaureate Learner Profile.

This exercise, our own form of "bibliotherapy," has been very well-received by students, especially by newcomers to the school and those experiencing learning difficulties.

An example of this exercise might be centered on the theme of empathy. The counselor would inform the librarian of that week's chosen theme, or they would discuss it together. A clear objective could then be established—building empathy, for example, or the ability to identify another's feelings by their facial expression or body language.

The librarian would then choose a selection of books to highlight this theme, or use books recommended by the counselor. For example, Early Education: *Join in and Play* by Cheri Meiners; Grade 1: *Hooray For You!* by Marianne Richmond; Grade 2: *The Way I Act* by Steve Metzger; Grade 3: *Carla's Sandwich* by Debbie Herman; Grades 4 and 5: Sorry! by Trudy Ludwig.

The counselor would then physically visit the library, read a selected story, and then discuss with the students in groups key questions and overall themes, such as: Did you see anyone's face at recess that showed sadness, anger, frustration, worry, or shame? How did this make you feel? Can you share an observed feeling that happened today? Did anyone notice? or care? How did you know? What can we do together?

At the end of the exercise, the librarian and the counselor offer their own personal opinions and conclude by asking students to take time to reflect and evaluate what they have learned during the exercise and to think ahead for the next month's theme.

The school counselor plays a unique role similar to that of the school librarian in that both are supportive roles, facilitating student learning, creativity, and imagination. The role is indirect, flexible, and relies on a different chemistry compared to the traditional teacher-student dynamic.

Perceptions about the work of school librarians and school counselors contrast sharply with reality. Both roles are increasingly mobile and require a ubiquitous presence throughout the school. The library should not be centralized but rather diffuse throughout classrooms and departments, whose reserves should be constantly refreshed and restocked according to the climate, locale, and school profile. By collaborating with the librarian, the school counselor becomes a visible public face with whom students will hopefully connect.

Using the Library Management System (LMS), the librarian can tag keywords while cataloging to create a bibliography for easy reference. Hence any parent, student, or teacher should be able to search the LMS remotely or on-site using keywords such as empathy or loneliness or any of the Learner Profile attributes. This is very useful to complement the units of inquiry within the PYP, especially when it comes to fiction books. Part of the Librarian's role is to be familiar with the stock so that they know what themes occur in each book. Through effective cataloging this then becomes a permanent reference.

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