

Erica Bustos

Training Library Aides

Population: 6 library aides (2 per periods 1-3); 2 head librarians

Location: Lynwood High School

Timeframe: April 10 -14

Introduction

This research activity focuses on identifying the most important skills necessary for student library aides to have to effectively interact with students and staff in the library setting. Information was gathered from six current library aides and one head librarian through in-person interviews. Questions focused on identifying key skills deemed most important to develop to be able to effectively work in the library. Perceptions were also gathered from the participants relating to their current thoughts about the library program and suggestions for improvement. Observations were also conducted to observe student library aides interacting with library patrons.

The purpose of this research activity is to identify the most important skills to teach library aides to create a universal program for training library aides and other library helpers. For privacy purposes, names of participants have been omitted and interview responses will be synthesized and generalized where applicable.

Interviews

To gather data, I began by interviewing one of the head librarians through an in-person interview. The interview lasted about 15 minutes and consisted of 5 questions. The questions consisted of asking the head librarian to identify the most important qualifications necessary to learn for successful library management and asking about how she trained her staff to perform certain tasks (shelving, accessing catalog, copying, poster machine, etc), deal with unfavorable situations, how to deal with technology issues, and what to do in situations where they do not know the answer.

To gather data from the student aides, I also used in-person interviews. These interviews lasted about 15 minutes and consisted of four questions. The questions asked the student aides to identify the most important qualifications necessary to be successful in library management, explain how they were taught or learned the necessary skills, their perceptions of the current library program and its role/place in the school culture along with any suggestions for improvement.

Interviews were administered throughout the week with one student being interviewed per period and the head librarian being interviewed first at the beginning of the week.

Findings

The major findings from the seven interviews conducted show that some of the major skills identified by both the major librarian and the student aids include knowing how to locate and shelve books, knowing how to check out and check in books, and knowing how to use the available technology such as the computers, poster maker, laminating machine, and copy machine.

Other information identified in the interviews included how the head librarian trains her helpers in locating material through the Dewey Decimal system for nonfiction and through author's last name for fiction. Most of the training is conducted as a learn as you go strategy. She also emphasized knowing where to find textbooks as many students come in to complete homework during various times of the day. Lastly, she emphasized the importance of checking that students have a pass from their teacher showing permission to be at the library during class time.

Information gathered from the student aide centered interviews relating to their perceptions of the library described the library as an important place in the school where all students can study, complete homework, or receive tutoring help through the afterschool program. They also highlighted the library's importance to students during lunch since many students use that time to print out work, do homework, or use the media lab for entertainment purposes. Some students said they had no suggestions for improving the library but one student did suggest finding ways of promoting some of the newly purchased books for students to check out.

Lastly, observations of the student aides in action were also conducted. The observations were conducted as participant observation (Gravetter & Forzano, 2016). Findings from the observations showed some student aides as being more competent in library procedures than others. Therefore, some aides were better able to help patrons while others had to seek a librarian to complete the patrons' requests.

Implications

The findings suggest that there needs to be a procedural way for the head librarians to teach new student aides or volunteers how to perform certain functions of the library that relate to checking out books and using the available equipment. The development of a library aide manual may be helpful in outlining the various tasks associated with the position. The head librarian may also want to teach students the Dewey decimal system or classification procedures if needed through activities that ask students to test or practice classifications. A universal training plan would ensure that all student aides receive the same training and information to be able to help patrons as much as possible.

In terms of the suggestion made by one student aid, the head librarians may want to seek assistance from the afterschool program that occupies the library after school and gather input from administrators and teachers for suggestions on how to increase the students' knowledge and interest in reading for learning and entertainment.

Works Cited

Gravatter, F. J., & Forzano, L.B., (2016). *Research Methods for the Behavioral Sciences*. 5th Ed. Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning. Print