

First Library Observation

On Thursday, February 24th, I had an appointment to visit Northern Guilford High School's Media Center. The Media Specialist, Mrs. Adams-Caskie, was having a very busy day. It was an early release day for Guilford County. The shortened schedule increased the frequency of movement and bells. I arrived around 8:30 a.m. School had not started yet. Students were everywhere in common areas. The library was packed with students as well. I met Mrs. Adams-Caskie's assistant. She was behind the circulation desk that was a large oval desk in the center of the room. The library itself was a large room. Non-fiction surrounded the walls on the right side of the circulation desk. Tables filled the remainder of the floor space on that side. Fiction filled the other side of the room both in shelves around the perimeter as well as rows of shelves in the floor space. Computers lined the back wall of the library. Seating areas were scattered about, but mostly on the fiction side of the room. I watched the student activity. Most were sitting and talking. It was quite loud in the library. All the computers were occupied with students using them. Some students were checking out books. Mrs. Adams-Caskie was assisting students in finding books and was visiting with students during this time.

As the first bell rang signaling students to move on to their first class, Mrs. Adams-Caskie and I moved into her office. Most of my time there was spent talking with her about her duties and responsibilities. She worked on things in her office while we talked. The bell system had issues that day. Their bell system starts with music. Someone had programmed the music that day around the Black History Month theme. The recording seemed to get stuck and was causing a delay in the bell. Mrs. Adams-Caskie had to fix it. I followed her into the back part of the library beyond her office to the storage rooms and equipment room. In the equipment room, she made adjustments to the bell system. As she returned to her office, she was approached by a teacher who was having difficulty with a laptop.

As she verified the teacher's problem, she explained that Northern High's set up allows teachers to take their laptops home. She feels this is the main reason she experiences so many computer problems.

I stayed with Mrs. Adams-Caskie until 11:45. I followed her on errands to check connections and answer teacher's computer issues throughout the school. We spent a good bit of time talking about the high school media program. She said high school libraries offer little instruction. They offer more assistance to teachers who are doing projects with their classes. Classes do not have regular scheduled visits to the library. Teachers only reserve the library when they have a need. Students are allowed in the library before school, during the 10:00 a.m. break, during lunch, and after school. Most of the high school media program is technology. She was in the process of setting up Nooks she had purchased to get them into students' hands. This was something new for the school media program. Students had to have a parent's signed release before they were allowed to check out a Nook. This signed release states that parents are aware that they will be financially responsible if the Nook is damaged or lost during their child's loan. She currently has three Nooks with 5 titles on each.

As I was preparing to leave, Mrs. Adams-Caskie and I walked through the library. We discussed her collection of 12,500 books. She is still building her collection as the school is only a few years old. Her signs were a big topic of conversation. Art students had made them. The fiction signs were amazing. Because her fiction collection is classified by genre, the students incorporated the genre itself into the genre title in the artwork. The non-fiction signs were not so fantastic. They were very hard to read. Mrs. Adams-Caskie addressed it right off the bat, saying how pleased she was with the art signs; however, the non-fiction signs were not very effective and were very difficult to read. The student who made the non-fiction signs graduates in June, and Mrs. Adams-Caskie plans to replace the signs then.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the high school and appreciated seeing the difference between middle school media programming and high school media programming. High school media

programming is much more technology based. In comparison to Southeast Middle School, Northern High does not have a set schedule for classroom visits to the library. I do not know if this is typical for either of these types of schools. However, for the high school to not have regularly scheduled classroom visits, I feel students are limited in having time in the library. Subsequently, I question when students will have opportunities to visit for pleasure reading. Classes are scheduled to visit the library during projects only. This is probably related to collaboration on research with the librarian as well as limited time in the schedule.

At first when I arrived, I noticed the signage around the room and beautiful mobiles over the circulation desk which is large and in the center of the room. Unlike the clear indication of the fiction signs, the non-fiction signs were very difficult to read. I would have to replace them. Later, in my conversation with Mrs. Adams-Caskie, the subject came up and she addressed their function. The circulation desk in the center of the room posed concern for me. I have come to understand that most schools do not have assistants. I wondered how the librarian could get her work done in her office when her office was so far from the circulation desk. In this particular school, there is an assistant who mans the circulation desk full time. I still questioned how this would work in a school without an assistant.

Another thing I noticed was that the fiction section was separated into genres. This is similar to bookstores because high school students like the distinction of looking for books more in their genres than younger students. Back at the middle school, I have learned that the students are still learning how to use the library. Many do not know how to use the catalog or locate books on the shelves. Many do not know the difference between genres. Therefore, I realize that having books labeled by genres at the middle school level might limit students' ability to choose books based on initial interest. This means that students may determine they don't like mysteries and will steer clear of mysteries even if they haven't read one.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed my time with Mrs. Adams-Caskie at Northern High School.

I learned a great deal about high school librarianship and how it differs from middle school librarianship.

I equally look forward to visiting an elementary school library and comparing the three levels of school media programming.