

Media Center Visits Reflection

Doing my practicum at Jesse Wharton Elementary school allowed me the opportunity to visit a media center in a middle school and a high school. On Thursday, October 4, I visited Page High School in Greensboro, North Carolina. On Thursday, October 18, I visited Northwest Middle School in Oak Ridge, North Carolina. All three schools are located within the Guilford County School District.

Part I – A look at the schools

Northwest Middle School

On a combined campus with Northwest High School, Northwest Middle School is located in the northwest corner of Guilford County. A county school, located in a more rural area, the Northwest Middle is a high profile school for its student performance. The 2010-2011 NC School Report Card listed Northwest Middle as an Honor School of Excellence due to a 90 percent rate of students performing at grade level on End-of-Grade testing (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010-2011). Student demographics represent over 80 percent of Northwest Middle's 900+ students are white and non-economically disadvantaged (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction,

2010-2011). According to the media specialist, Mrs. Mary Beth Shiflett, there was high turnover and much dissent coming into the new school year as a result of the principal. That principal left the school right before the school resumed in August and the new administration team is still being rebuilt (Shiflett, 2012). There are currently around 60 instructional teachers at Northwest Middle.

Mrs. Shiflett had an assistant until last year. This year, Mrs. Shiflett is single-handedly responsible for the complete operation and management of the media program, the school's technology, and technology training of teachers. Volunteers are minimal and extremely unreliable according to Mrs. Shiflett. At best, she has the school's In-School Suspension officer who can do menial tasks to aid the media program.

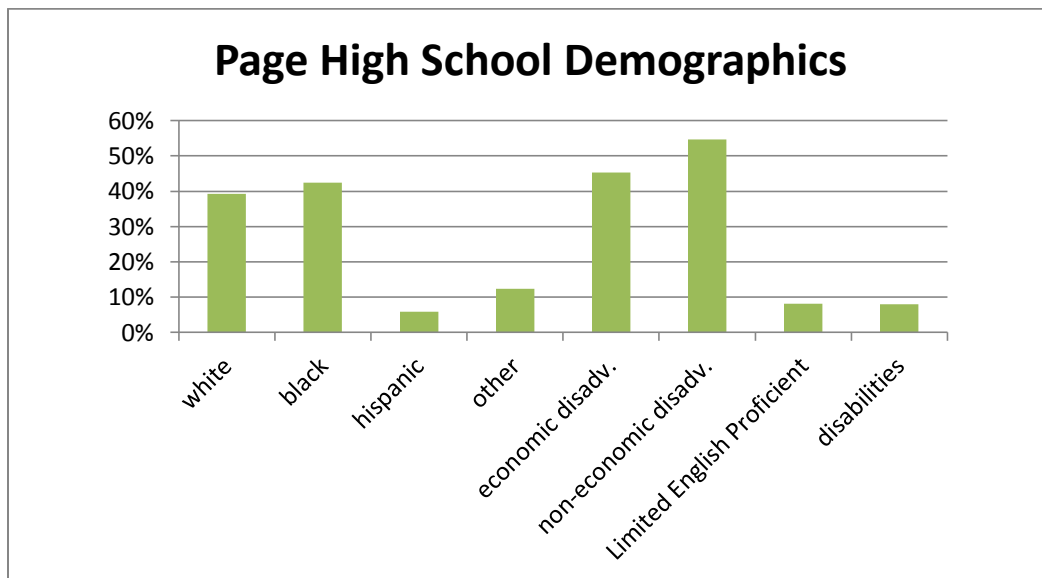
The media center at Northwest Middle currently has a print collection of over 15,000 items (Shiflett, 2012). Although the media center is run on a flexible schedule, Mrs. Shiflett routinely emails the language arts teachers to schedule time in the library for student checkouts and returns, book talks, CIPA and other mandated student instruction, and collaborative instruction. According to Mrs. Shiflett, there are 12 language arts teachers, four per grade level. Each grade level has 12 classes: two high Advanced Learner, two hetero (moderate), one lower level learner, and seven regular level (Shiflett, 2012). In essence, there are 36 language arts classes which coordinate time in the media center on an average of every four to five weeks (Shiflett, 2012). Students are also permitted to come to the library before and after school as well as during their lunch time for open check out.

Mrs. Shiflett sees her role of media specialist to consist of three main components: support of curriculum, running the library, and teacher instruction. The media center currently only runs one program, the middle school Battle of the Books. Mrs. Shiflett says there is no time to offer anything else. She states she would like to start a teacher/student book club. However, Mrs. Shiflett indicated that teachers do not have time before school as they are preparing for the day and are not willing to stay after school which ends each day at 3:50 p.m.

Despite the lack of assistance, the high level of responsibility, and the busy schedule of managing the media program, Mrs. Shiflett's media center is meticulous. Large red signs are displayed above shelves signifying where call numbers or sections begin. Books are not only very neatly arranged on the shelves, they are accurately arranged by their Dewey Decimal numbers. Non-fiction runs in high shelves around the perimeter of the room. Where the Non-fiction ends, the Fiction section begins until wall space stops near the circulation desk. Fiction, then, moves to lower shelves that are used to divide the room into group areas. The group areas vary in size. Overall, there is seating for two classes to utilize the media center at one time. Computer stations are arranged in clusters in several places in the media center. All computer stations are on high, bar-counter height desks without seating. The only things out of place seemed to be the remains of the book fair that ended the day prior to my visit. Even so, these items were neatly packed and ready to be returned to the vendor. Most auxiliary book fair items had been removed. Only a few empty boxes under computer stations were all that were left that needed to be put away according to Mrs. Shiflett.

Page High School

Page High School is located off Cone Boulevard and is one of the county's high schools located inside the city of Greensboro. The 2010-2011 North Carolina School Report Card indicates that Page High School has a student enrollment of about 1,800 students (North Carolina Department of Instruction, 2010-2011). The student demographics are quite diverse. The following chart reflects the percentages of the student population in regards to its demographic cultures:



Despite the diverse student population, Page High School is a distinguished school. During the 2010-2011 school year, Page High School was classified as a school of distinction with high growth, having 80 to 90 percent of students scoring at grade level on the End-of-Grade testing (North Carolina Department of Public

Instruction, 20210-2011). Page has approximately 100 instructional teachers. This school year also brought a new principal and several changes to administration. Due to administrative changes, turnover was also higher this last year (Kunka, 2012).

Page High's media program is run jointly by Jen Kunka and Sally Delellis. Mrs. Kunka has been at Page for six years and oversaw most of changes to the media center in recent years, including categorizing the fiction section based on genre. Mrs. Delellis has been at Page for about three years. While Page's media center does not have parent volunteers, the media program does participate in a curricular-based student assistants program in which eleven students are currently enrolled (Kunka, 2012). These assistants are present almost every period of the school day.

The media center at Page High currently has a print collection of over 14,000 items (Kunka, 2012). Its schedule is flexible. The media center is used fairly regularly for meetings and special events because of its size. According to Mrs. Kunka, the media center was expanded during a remodel and is approximately 10,000 square feet in size assumed to be the largest media center within Guilford County Schools. The seating capacity in group areas affords for approximately three classes (100 seats) at one time. In addition, there is a classroom computer lab in the far right corner of the media center along with a smaller computer lab of approximately twelve stations behind the media specialists' desks. Other seating includes a café lounge area of about 24 seats and single desks and computer stations intermittently placed throughout the media center. Materials are arranged by non-fiction, biographies, and a Barnes and Noble genre-style for fiction. Student created artwork is displayed in the form of an incomplete wall mural and various sculptures throughout the room. The media

specialists sit in simple desks facing each other directly behind the circulation desk and entrance. An official office is located to the right of the circulation desk, which is used for making books shelf ready and other similar duties requiring more space, is not used as often.

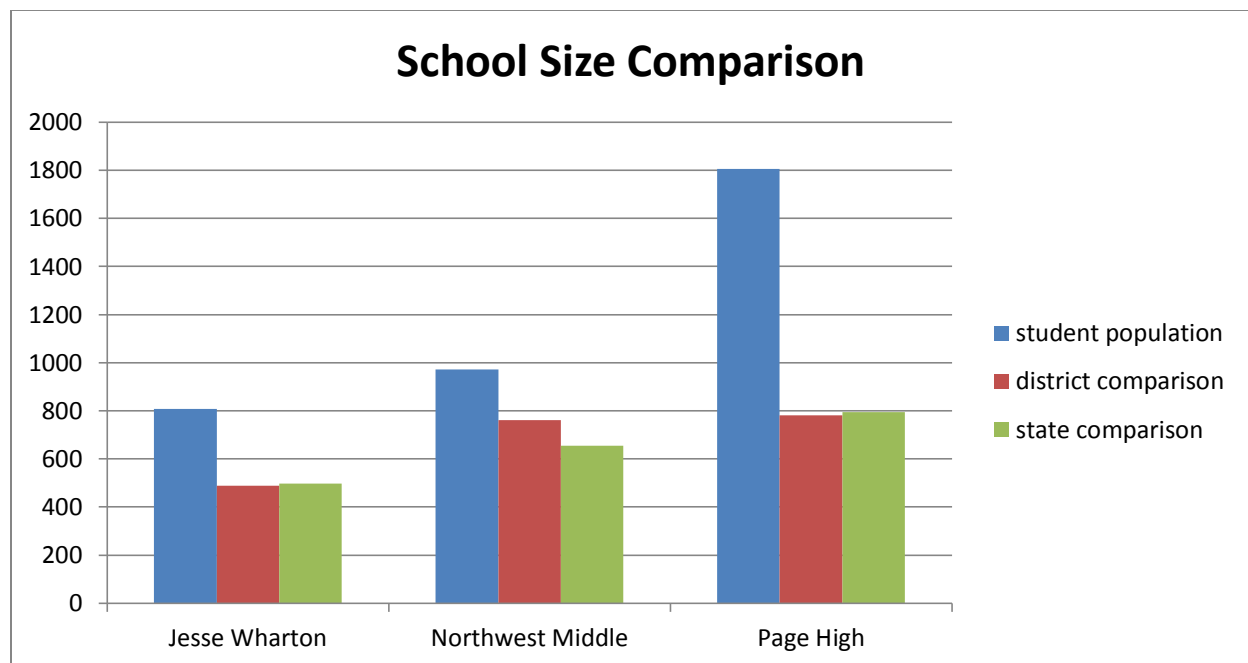
Mrs. Kunka and Mrs. Delellis work as a team, each doing whatever needs to be done at the moment. Mrs. Delellis, however, does most of the scheduling of computer lab usage and media center visits. They are also responsible for all technology troubleshooting and managing the school's website. Programs that the media center runs include the new high school Battle of the Books, the school's online/distant learning program, and special events such as freshman orientation and senior projects.

When asked Mrs. Kunka says that the role of the media specialist is to support student learning however they can. This includes helping teachers in any way that they are in need so that the teachers feel better equipped and empowered to do their job of teaching students. Another way Mrs. Kunka and Mrs. Delellis support student learning is through the media center's providing materials for as many different needs within the huge diversity of the student body. This becomes a challenge with having a wide range of reading levels. Page's students cover the spectrum from the lower level and limited English proficient needs to the upper level and the International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement students. In addition, every ethnic and personal interest calls for a great deal of care in materials selection to ensure that all students feel they are cared about and have the help that they need (Kunka, 2012).

Part II – Three Schools Comparison and Reflection

Size and Staff

During the 2010-2011 school year, Jesse Wharton Elementary, Northwest Middle School, and Page High School were large schools. The following chart compares the student enrollment to the district and state average school level enrollments.



This information is important to notate. The size of the school will have impact on the many things. The size of the collection will need to be big enough to meet the curricular and personal needs of its users. There is a certain amount of time that is needed to manage the collection is also based on the collection size and its usage. Additionally, to service the population, staffing is another area that will be impacted based on the size of the population. From my observations, it is clear that both Mrs. Brannon at Jesse Wharton and Mrs. Shiflett at Northwest Middle are extremely understaffed for their student users. Having seen this first hand, I now realize how important it is to advocate

for adequate assistance in the media program. While it is not outwardly evident that the lack of assistance is having an impact on student learning, I feel it is arguable and research supports that more staff would afford the media specialist more time to assure that student learning is getting the full attention it needs through the media program (Scholastic, 2008).

In comparison, Page High's two media specialists work together as a team to meet the needs of the users. During my visit, it was evident that when one was busy the other was available to answer questions or assist others. It was a constant exchange. This exemplifies the importance of assistance and having qualified personnel in the media center.

Because staffing is an obvious deficit for Jesse Wharton Elementary and Northwest Middle, it would appear significant to advocate for and seek volunteers. Not only would volunteerism provide assistance to the media program, the support would also provide opportunity for the media program to reach into the homes of students to support community literacy. However, I noticed that there are minimal parent volunteers at either of these schools. This might be due to the fact that Northwest Middle had a full-time assistant up until this last year and parents may not know there is now a need. This understanding is essential to the building of advocacy for the library. I must remember that no one is going to support the library without my being able and willing to advocate for the program's strengths as well as needs. As a next step, I need to have an advocacy plan or develop an advocacy plan once I am in a building level program to gain support for that program.

Two of the schools have student workers. Jesse Wharton Elementary has student volunteers who come early in the morning and late in the afternoon during the actual school day. Page High's media assistants are enrolled in an elective course that follows a curriculum. The most relevant aspect of having student assistants is the promotion of the library. Students sign up to work in the library. This demonstrates a positive image of the media program which students will share with others. This, too, is another way to promote advocacy for the media program as students have a positive attitude toward their work and tell others about their work and the library. I feel that student assistants are an asset to the program. As such, I plan to seek student assistants when I am in a building level program.

Programs

All three schools are participating in having a Battle of the Books program. Initially, I thought that Battle of the Books was just an extra-curricular club. However, I have come to understand that Battle of the Books is a literacy promoting opportunity for students. This information increased my awareness of the program's importance. Because I am not overly familiar with Battle of the Books, I have not had the opportunity to participate or facilitate a Battle of the Books program myself. When I am in a building level program, I will need to investigate how to organize and manage a Battle of the Books program in order to promote literacy and reading within the school.

Upon examining the programs supported and/or run by the media center of each school, I noticed that each school has their perspective on programs. After discussing

programs with Mrs. Brannon, she indicated she only offers Battle of the Books and the student assistant volunteer program. Unofficially she has established a special collection of books that she has multiple copies of for self-forming reading groups. Otherwise, she stated she does not have funds or time to offer other programs (Brannon, 2012). Mrs. Shiflett also stated she does not have time to offer programs other than Battle of the Books. Although she would like to start a book club to promote reading and have teachers model reading for students, she does not have time or teacher participation.

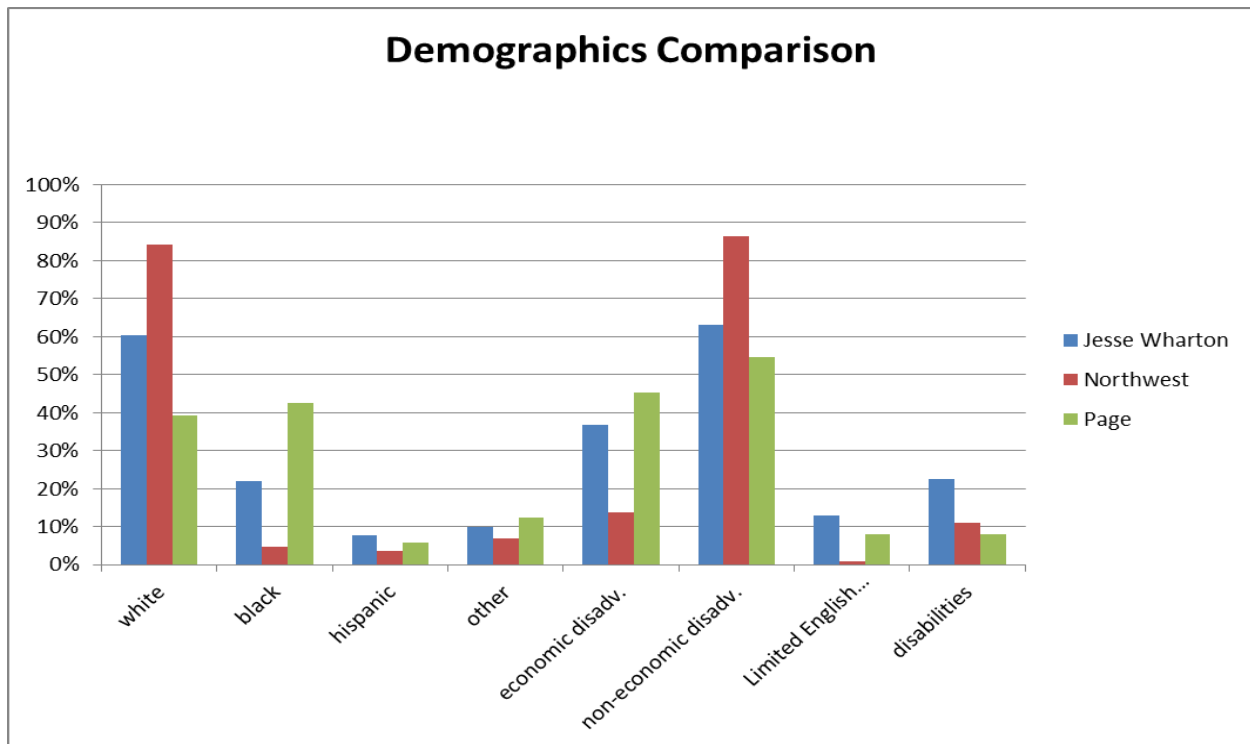
Page High, however, does run programs out of the media center for their school, such as the online distance learning program. This is not a media center-initiated or funded program. This is a school program that the media center and media specialists have been placed in charge of overseeing. This may be due to the fact that the program requires a small class space and computers for the students as well as some general supervision. While running such programs as online distance learning is not a program offered by the school's media program, the knowledge that such programs are often delegated to the media center and media specialist is important for me to be aware of when I am in a building level program. Because I am not in a building level program, my understanding of what is actually required of me in my role may be different based on the administration and/or the needs of the school itself. This will require me to be flexible.

Unfortunately, none of the three schools are offering much in the realm of programs. Having noticed this, I wonder if it is more than just a lack of time and funding. In the future, I will have to consider ways to incorporate programs that will

support learning, reading, and promotion of the library. Perhaps, considering partnering with a neighboring library would help divide the time and funding constraints.

Student Learning

One theme that I noticed between the three schools was the media specialist felt highly responsible for impact on student learning. Giving some thought to this, I realized that each school has a diverse population and need base that affects student learning. The following chart illustrates the diverse population of each school in comparison.



Each school has a diverse student representation. This has impact on student learning.

This knowledge is essential to identify how ethnicity and other demographical

challenges may present specific needs within the collection as well as instruction in the media center so that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve learning. In addition to understanding the student diversity, I took special notice to Mrs. Kunka's attitude that she needs to know the level and ability of every student in order to make them feel cared about. While this seems like an overwhelming task, this understanding is important for me in many ways. First, I need to always remember that the students are the library's biggest user group. Secondly and more importantly, the students are the reason any of us are at the school to begin with. They are there to learn and explore their world with our assistance, whether that assistance is in providing materials or helping with research.

Overall Impressions of Schools

On the day that I visited Northwest Middle School's media center and Mrs. Shiflett, the yearly book fair had just come to a close. All the materials were neatly packed up and ready to be returned to the vendor. Mrs. Shiflett had a few residual prizes to pass out to students who came in following the morning announcements. Mrs. Shiflett scheduled me on a day that she knew would be a day that her workload would be lighter. This allowed me to ask questions and have her give more candid responses. I was able to shadow her and assist her as she collected materials for a science teacher wanting resources. This is where I noticed how thoroughly organized her shelves were. Having noticed how neatly the books were arranged on the shelves along with how few were truly out of sequence, I wondered what the circulation was like and if it were low.

When I asked Mrs. Shiflett, I found that circulation averaged between 2,000 and 2,400 items each month. After searching through three areas of her non-fiction section, I found only two books slightly out of order! Amazing. While I previously believed that time would not allot for accuracy in shelving and that in close proximity was the best one could hope for, I learned that accuracy can take place in shelving even with limited time and assistance. This was very important to me as I am beginning to establish beliefs and practices that I will take with me into a building level program.

Additionally, I was able to attend a grade level meeting of the 8th grade language arts teachers and Mrs. Shiflett as she discussed the recommended reading lists that the county is now adhering to. This was the first opportunity I have had to witness a media specialist in a grade-level meeting with teachers. I appreciated this opportunity since I have not had one before and know that I will have similar meetings in the future.

On the day that I visited Page High School's media center, the media specialists were busy, but seemed laid back about it. This made me feel somewhat like they were "hosting" me, and I wondered if they or their days were like this all the time. While they were never idle, always busy checking this or doing that, the day was rather uneventful. One teacher needed a cable installed and I tagged along as Mrs. Kunka went to install it. While there, Mrs. Kunka was able to troubleshoot other computer related issues the teacher was having and give the teacher some minor assistance which will have big dividends for the teacher. Mrs. Kunka was extremely gracious and serving. This attitude of the teacher's needs are important as well as Mrs. Kunka's attitude that she was there to serve the teachers and make the teacher's job easier was impressive, there is just no other way to describe it. I took a lot out of that few minutes. While I

have always tried to assist teachers as they request help, Mrs. Kunka's demeanor was so kind it went beyond assistance. This is the kind of mannerism and attitude I want to have when I am in a building level program. I feel it is important to begin now making sure I go beyond the expected politeness and assistance with teachers and students to demonstrating a greater service attitude and initiative.

Conclusion

Visiting Northwest Middle School and Page High School gave me a realistic glimpse into the different levels of school media programming. This knowledge will be very beneficial when I am in a building level program in so much that I will need to know how each level operates and how each level differs from the other. Knowing that each school and each school media program is different, even schools on the same grade level, will help me remain flexible and better prepared to assist student learning.

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