PROTOCOL FOR FOCUS GROUPS

New York State's School Libraries and School Library Media Specialists
- An Impact Study

Through the Center for Digital Literacy at Syracuse University, Dr. Ruth Small is leading a study to learn more about perceptions of the impact of New York State's school libraries on student learning and motivation. Funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, this research will help the school library community better understand the role of the school library media center, and provide information on ways in which school library programs and services might be developed and improved to effectively support student learning and motivation.

Objective

The focus group will elicit discussion of school library programs and the ways in which the school library media specialists feel the programs has affected student learning and motivation. School library media specialists will be encouraged to discuss both their individual school library programs and school library programs, in general.

Discussion Areas

Specific topics for discussion will include:

- collaboration
- family and community
- use of technology
- research skills
- literature appreciation
- leadership
- inclusion of students with disabilities

Description of the Participants
The focus group sessions will be conducted with twenty-four consenting New York State school library media specialists who participated in all prior phases of this research study (general survey, in-depth survey). Other members of their school community (administrators, teachers, parents, students, etc.) will not be present. The twenty-four participants will be separated into two group of twelve participants each. Aside from the participants, the investigator, Dr. Ruth Small, and two of her research associates will be present.

Informed Consent

Informed consent forms will be emailed and received by research associate Jaime Snyder at jasnyd01@syr.edu prior to the focus group sessions.

Description of the Focus Group

The participants and the facilitators will communicate using Elluminate Web conferencing software. The facilitator will begin the meeting by introducing herself and explaining that the purpose of the focus group session will be to learn about the impacts of school library programs on student learning and motivation. The focus group sessions will last approximately 90 minutes. They will be recorded.

Scheduling the Focus Group

The focus group sessions will be held during hours beyond those of a traditional school day. Thus, participants can contribute to the discussion from their homes without fear of interruption by members of the school community. Dr. Ruth Small and her research associates will work with school library media specialists to select a time that is convenient for the participants.

Focus Group Discussion Guide

The following broad questions will provide the framework for the focus group discussion. While questions that are not listed here may be asked in order to follow up on participant responses, the focus group discussions will center on these main questions. The introduction and debriefing statements will be read to the participants.

Introduction

“Hello, my name is _____________. The purpose of this focus group discussion is to learn more about your school library and the role it plays in student learning and motivation. We would like you to share your honest feelings about any impacts, positive or negative, of school library programs on students. Your contributions to this discussion will be kept confidential, and your names, the names of your schools, and any other identifying information will not be used in any communication resulting from this research.”
We have a limited amount of time, so I may have to interrupt from time to time to keep our discussion moving.

**Opening Question**

- Could each of you tell me your name and the name of your school?

**Introductory Question**

- In what ways does your school library program impact student learning?

**Transition Question**

- In what ways has the school library influenced the use of technology by including students, teachers, administrators, etc. in your school?

**Suggested Follow-Up Questions**

- How would you rate your own proficiency with technology---beginner, intermediate, experienced?

- What is your role regarding technology in your school?

- Can you provide an example of how you have motivated teachers to use technology?

- Can you provide an example of how you have helped students use technology?

- Given unlimited time, funds, and authority, how would you like to see the use of technology in your school library media center change?

**Suggested Follow-Up Questions**

- In your opinion, what is the most important skill you teach students and why?
• How would you rate your teaching skills--- beginner, intermediate, experienced?

• Can you give an example of a time when you taught teachers something new?

• Can you give an example of a time when you taught students something and how it made a difference?

Transition Question

• How do you support students in the development of reading preferences?

Suggested Follow-Up Questions

• How do you select materials for your collection?

• Do you feel that it is your job to teach students to read? Why or why not?

• Do you feel that it is your role to monitor students’ selection of reading materials? Why or why not?

• How do you motivate student reading?

Transition Question

• In what ways do you act as a leader in your school?

Suggested Follow-Up Questions

• How do you advocate to your administration for your school library program?

• How do you influence policies and procedures in your school or district?

• In what ways do you participate in the school library media professional community either locally, regionally or nationally?

Transition Question

• What do you see as some of the benefits of collaborating with other educators?

Suggested Follow-Up Questions
• Who do you collaborate with the most and how?

• How has scheduling influenced your opportunities for collaboration?

• How do you motivate teachers to collaborate?

**Transition Question**

• In what ways does the school library program provide services to students with disabilities?

**Suggested Follow-Up Questions**

• In what ways have you tried to make your school library program more accessible to students with disabilities?

• What training have you received regarding educating students with disabilities?

• In what ways do you collaborate with other educators to meet the varying learning styles, needs, and abilities of the students?

**Transition Question**

• How have you promoted your school library program to parents and families?

**Suggested Follow-Up Questions**

• How do you promote your school library program to the community?

• How do you communicate with the families of your students?

• What services and resources do you offer to families and the broader community?

**Ending Question**

• In what way has your school library program made the largest impact on student learning?

**Debriefing**

I would like to personally thank you for your participation. I would also like to restate that the information shared is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifying information will be used in any articles,
reports, presentations, or other publicly accessible media resulting from this research.

Finally, I would like to provide you with an opportunity to ask any questions that you may have about this research. Do you have any questions for me?

For additional information, please contact:
Jaime Snyder, Research Associate
jasnyd01@syr.edu