

Volume 21, 2018
ISSN: 2165-1019

Approved March 17, 2018
www.ala.org/aasl/slr

School Librarians as Co-Teachers of Literacy: Librarian Perceptions and Knowledge in the Context of the Literacy Instruction Role

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Abstract

cooperation of all school stakeholders has been recognized as necessary to counter deficits in students' reading ability.

To understand the potential of this legislation to improve instructional collaboration, it is helpful to frame this unprecedented mandate with the theory of collaborative behavior of teachers and school librarians developed by Patricia Montiel-Overall (2005). Her Teacher and Librarian Collaboration model (TLC model) proposed four steps, beginning with the low-level Model A, in which teachers and librarians merely share time and resources. The next stage is Model B, during which limited cooperation takes place with a minimum of time commitment and/or co-planning. A far greater level of integrated instruction happens at Model C, in which teachers and librarians work jointly to produce instructional content and delivery. In the fourth and highest step, Model D, the school librarian is afforded the opportunity to plan instruction with each classroom teacher at least once over the course of the school year.

The TLC model is very helpful in considering the current state of school librarianship, as well as a future of potentially heightened collaboration under ESSA. Although many school librarians and/or other school

during potential library

specialists. School librarians co-design, co-implement, and co-evaluate interdisciplinary lessons and units of instruction that result in increased student learning. (AASL 2010)

This literacy instruction role was further detailed in *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs*:

[School librarians] model and collaboratively teach reading comprehension strategies: assess and use background knowledge, pose and answer questions that are appropriate to the task, make predictions and inferences, determine main ideas, and monitor reading comprehension, as well as the learning process (AASL 2009, 22).

These reading comprehension strategies were also addressed in the *National School Library Standards* adopted in 2017; in particular, the use of questioning strategies as well as the activation of background knowledge were two strategies cited under the “Inquire” Shared Foundation, within the “Think” Domain (AASL 2018, 47).

In addition to AASL mandates, widely adopted education standards such as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have also promoted a strong role for the school librarian in literacy instruction, emphasizing reading comprehension strategies (Uecker, Kelly, and Napierala 2014). Judi Moreillon produced a matrix demonstrating the direct overlap of CCSS with AASL’s 2007 *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*. She found fourteen individual standards matching such strategies as activating background knowledge, determining main ideas, and drawing inferences (2013b). Clearly, the support of reading comprehension strategies falls within the school librarian’s job duties as defined by AASL. It is uncertain, however, the level at which school librarians are prepared to meet this challenge, from the perspectives of their knowledge of literacy instruction and their willingness to help students and colleagues at this expanded level.

School Librarians’ Knowledge of the Literacy Instruction Role

The “ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians” clearly stipulate in standard 2.4 that graduate-level preparation programs should educate librarians about techniques that support literacy strategies: “Candidates collaborate with classroom teachers to reinforce a wide variety of reading instructional strategies to ensure P–12 students are able to create meaning from text” (2010, 6). Despite this charge, in Tennessee preparation programs for school librarians have been largely noncompliant. We found that in Tennessee only one program

instructional strategies. However, the Director of Reading Coaching for Tennessee's Department of Education stated that librarians are not the focus for this instruction, and their training is at the discretion of individual school districts (Norton 2017). As a result, it is improbable that significant numbers of school librarians will receive literacy instruction training through Tennessee's present on-the-job PD initiative.

School Librarians' Perceptions Regarding the Literacy Instruction Role

Research suggests that there is a widespread perception among librarians that literacy instruction is not a priority (Moreillon 2009, 2014; Tilley 2013). Instead, the evidence suggests that many school librarians focus on the instructional goal of information literacy (Latham, Gross, and Witte 2013; Will 2016). Additional evidence states that this instructional focus may be different based on instruction level. For example, elementary school librarians are more likely to see themselves as teachers. In contrast, secondary school librarians are more likely to emphasize

Research Regarding Best Practices in Educator PD

In designing professional development for this study, we considered many best practices for educator PD identified by the literature. The importance of a collaborative learning environment has been emphasized in the literature (Abilock, Harada, and Fontichiaro 2013), and was found to be particularly effective when similar learning groups of educators were formed—for example, teachers from the same subject area or grade level (Garet et al. 2001). Coherence, referring to instructional content that makes explicit connections to one’s workday activities, has been identified as another vital component of effective PD (Garet et al. 2001). The use of one-day teacher in-service training sessions (often referred to

Research Questions

Table 5. Repeated-measures ANOVA for Knowledge.

Source	N	df	F	p	Partial Eta Squared (effect size)
Time	31	1	89.21	.000	.76
Time x Cohort	77.4	663	24	77.4	.000

Table 7. Results of dependent t-test on perceptions outcome.

	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Elementary cohort	3.07	4.65	2.55	14	0.023
Secondary cohort	3.38	6.03	2.24	15	0.041

An ANOVA was used to compare the effect of the professional development on participant perceptions before and after instruction. There was a significant main effect of Time on participants' perception gains when the results of both cohorts were combined (F

Table 9. Emergent themes from open and axial coding (selective coding).

Code	Characteristics of Selective Code	Related Codes
A	Demonstrated enthusiasm about the new ideas from class.	High LA, COL
B	Some limited experience with the literacy instruction role; aspires to be more intentional in the future.	Moderate LIR
C	A newcomer to the literacy instruction role.	Low LIR
D	Big attitude shift regarding the literacy instruction role.	High LA, CON
E	Very traditional librarian role initially.	High TIR

Qualitative analysis of the Knowledge construct was designed to capture participants' views regarding structural elements of the course delivery that may have been conducive to learning. In analyzing participants' writings, a theme emerged suggesting that the collaborative nature of the class had contributed to student learning. For example, during the third week of class one student wrote in a discussion board post:

I must say, I found this chapter more challenging than the previous one. While I can definitely see the value in it, teaching students about sensory images will definitely take me out of my comfort zone!...My major struggles with this week are: 1. I have zero experience or comfort with using a think-aloud to talk about my feelings before, during, and after reading....Any suggestions???

The student received an overwhelming response, as over half of her cohort wrote back with concrete ideas on how to implement the strategy in question. This strong positive response seemed to embolden the student to continue adding to class discussions in the coming weeks. By

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Appendix B: Qualitative Data Coding Matrix

Qualitative Data Coding Matrix for Librarian Perceptions

Research question: As a result of the instructional intervention, how will participants experience a change in their knowledge and perceptions regarding the literacy instruction role of the school librarian?

1. Divided questions from the Perceptions section of the survey instrument into 4 coding categories:
 - x LITERACY INSTRUCTION ROLE (LIR) = the school librarian's view regarding their responsibility to teach literacy skills.
 1. I define the term "literacy" as the ability to read with at least a minimum level of proficiency.
 2. I consider the teaching and support of reading strategies to be a major responsibility of my job.
 3. I regularly collaborate with classroom teachers on joint lessons which include reading comprehension strategies.
 4. I incorporate reading comprehension skills within my lessons.
 - x LITERACY ATTITUDES (LA) = the school librarian's buy-in regarding the importance of literacy instruction.
 1. Increasing reading proficiency levels in students should be the main instructional focus in elementary schools.
 2. Every educator is a reading instructor.
 3. Reading proficiency levels in children are the single most important factor in how well they do in school.
 4. Increasing reading proficiency levels in students should be the main instructional focus in secondary (middle and high) schools.
 - x TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTION ROLE (TIR) = speaks to the traditional librarian role of information-literacy instruction (i.e., research skills)
 1. I regularly collaborate with classroom teachers on joint lessons to support information-literacy standards, for example research skills.
 2. I consider the teaching of information literacy (the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information resources) to be a major responsibility of my job.
 3. I define the term "literacy" as a person's knowledge of a particular subject or skill; for example "information literacy".

Cite This Article

Reed, Karen Nourse, and Eric L. Oslund. 2018. "School Librarians as Co-Teachers of Literacy: