
School Library Advocacy Literature in the United States: A Content Analysis

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Despite evidence of school librarians' impact on student achievement and multiple advocacy efforts, position eliminations and budget reductions continue across the United States. The researchers conducted a preliminary conceptual content analysis of the scholarly and practitioner literature about school library advocacy in the United States from 2001-2011 to determine methods of and rationales for advocacy. The most frequent advocacy method was distributing literature or information about school libraries. The most frequent reason cited in the literature for engaging in advocacy activities was in response to a potential funding or position reduction or elimination. Advocacy is highly contextualized and different situations may warrant different approaches. Viewing school library advocacy through an organizational evolution framework may frame the context. School library researchers should address the dearth of empirical and theoretical work on both the practice and impact of advocacy on the profession.

Introduction

This paper reviews the United States school library advocacy literature in the past ten years. Only 64% of K-12 public schools in the United States employ a state certified librarian (<http://keithcurrylance.com/2010-national-statistics-on-librarian-positions-by-school-district/>). The American Library Association (ALA) and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) advocate for school libraries and librarians at the federal level. Advocacy around the pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, U.S. federal legislation that greatly influences education policy in the United States, is one example. The associations also advocated for maintaining dedicated funding for the national *Improving Literacy through School Libraries* program, which establishes U.S. state goals of having a school library staffed by a licensed school librarian in each public school, and allows state and local professional development funds be used for recruiting and training school librarians (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advleg/federallegislation/eduleg/schoollibraries>).

The ALA worked with Rep. Jack Reid (D-RI) and Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) to re-introduce the Strengthening Kids' Interest in Learning and Libraries (SKILLS) act in 2011. This is one of the most recent advocacy attempts by the American Library Association (ALA, 2011a). Other national advocacy initiatives recently taken up include President Barack Obama's proposed American Jobs Act (ALA, 2011b), which allocates USD\$30 billion for K-12 education. Some of the funds can be applied to school libraries and librarians. Another advocacy initiative involves the U.S. National Broadband Plan, preserving E-Rate funding (a discount provided to schools and libraries for telecommunications). The American Library Association actively solicited comments and feedback regarding the formation of a national Digital Literacy Corps (ALA, 2012).

However, in almost every state in the U.S., school librarian eliminations continue. In our state of Arizona we have heard of at least five local school districts that completely eliminated school librarian positions in 2012 alone. There is a dearth of research on whether advocacy increases the likelihood of retaining librarian positions and promotes the value of the school library program staffed by a licensed librarian. We do not know the impact of school library advocacy by individual school librarians and other stakeholders. Furthermore, the impact of library associations' advocacy for the profession remains unanalyzed. We hope that a content analysis of the current literature on school library advocacy will inspire a line of inquiry into these phenomena.

Method

The purpose of this study is to describe and understand the landscape of school library advocacy literature in the United States from 2001-2011. Our research questions are

- What are the methods of school library advocacy described in the literature?
- What are the primary rationales for school library advocacy described in the literature?

First, we conducted a search of the scholarly and practitioner related to school library advocacy. We limited the data set to literature generated in the United States after 2001, using the adoption of the U.S. No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) as the latest demarcation of a distinct era of educational reform characterized by high-stakes accountability (Valli & Buese, 2007) and defined as a major restructure and change of the core aims of education (Hanson, 2001).

We searched the databases Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and the Wilson Library Literature & Information Science Index. We found a total of 63 publications in the two databases using the keywords "school library advocacy" with publication dates between 2001 and 2011. Grey literature and other ephemeral publications (e.g. web sites, conference reports and papers) were excluded from the review. Additionally, we did not include the "state studies" used extensively in advocacy campaigns (see <http://www.lrs.org/impact.php> for a full accounting of state studies).

First, we organized the data into nine categories. This preliminary step helped to describe and understand the landscape of school library advocacy literature in the United

States. We then conducted a conceptual content analysis (Beile, 2009; Busch, et al, 2005; Krippendorff, 2004) in order to examine the rate of occurrence of advocacy efforts and the existence of a rationale for advocacy for school library programs within the literature. We began by using the categories constructed. We then took a sample of the data set (one article from each of the nine categories) and applied an *a priori* coding scheme from Ewbank (2011) to construct a conceptual matrix. At the time of this writing, we have completed approximately one-third of the conceptual analysis. We are currently completing the conceptual analysis and beginning a relational analysis (Beile, 2009; Busch, et al, 2005; Krippendorff, 2004). A relational analysis helps us to understand the relationship among various concepts (reasons for advocacy, advocacy efforts, prospective stakeholders, etc.).

Findings

To date, we have analyzed twenty-seven of sixty-two publications. Here we describe the categories of school library advocacy literature and the findings from our conceptual analysis in process. We first identified nine categories within the school library advocacy literature, described in Table 1.

Table 1. *Categorization of School Library Advocacy Literature (Ewbank, 2011).*

Category	Publications
1 Advocacy by non-librarians	Heinsdorf, C. (2007). School library advocacy from an unexpected source. <i>Learning & Media</i> , 35(2), 6-7.
	Hultgren, J. (2009). The friends of Northside ISD libraries sets sail. <i>Library Media Connection</i> , 27(5), 38-39.
	Kaaland, C. (2009). A campaign of gratitude. <i>School Library Media Activities Monthly</i> , 25(9), 52-53.
	Whelan, D. L. (2008). Three Spokane moms save their school libraries. <i>School Library Journal</i> , 54(9), 36-41.
	Whelan, D. (2008). Mesa (AZ) School Board Votes to Eliminate School Librarians. <i>School Library Journal</i> . Retrieved from http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/slj/articlesfunding/859355-347/mesa_az_school_board_votes.html.csp
	Kenney, B. (2008). To Spokane, with love and gratitude. <i>School Library Journal</i> , 54(6), 11.
	Valenza, J. K., & Johnson, D. (2009). Things that keep us up at night. <i>School Library Journal</i> , 55(10), 28-32.
2 Advocacy by professional associations	Johns, S. K. (2007). Advocacy: AASL puts the puzzle together. <i>Knowledge Quest</i> , 36(1), 4-7.
	Phillip, C. (2007). Getting there: AASL's year in review. <i>Knowledge Quest</i> , 35(5), 4-6.
	Rettig, J. (2009). School libraries and the educational ecosystem. <i>Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning</i> , 41(2), 28-29.
	Williams, J. L. (2006). Advocacy: The first step in achieving it all. <i>Knowledge Quest</i> , 34(3), 4-6.
3 Advocacy involving school	Ewbank, A. D. (2011). Values-oriented factors leading to retention of school librarian positions: A school district case study. <i>School Library Research</i> ,

administrators	<p>14.</p> <p>Gallagher-Hayashi, D. (2001). Moving the fence: Engaging your principal in your school library program. <i>Teacher Librarian</i>, 28(5), 13-17.</p> <p>Greenberg, N. (2009). A superintendent's perspective on advocacy. <i>Knowledge Quest</i>, 38(2), 44-45.</p> <p>Hartzell, G. (2007). How do decision-makers become library media advocates? <i>Knowledge Quest</i>, 36(1), 32-35.</p> <p>Harvey, C. A. (2009). Principal perspective, part 3: Advocacy and shared vision. <i>School Library Media Activities Monthly</i>, 25(6), 51-53.</p> <p>Kachel, D. E. (2003). Partners for success: A school library advocacy training program for principals. <i>Knowledge Quest</i>, 32(2), 17-19.</p>
4 Dispositions of school librarians who are advocates	<p>Barron, D. D. (2003). The curse of the invisible library media specialist. <i>School Library Media Activities Monthly</i>, 19(5), 48-51.</p> <p>Dickinson, G. (2007). The question...can I achieve excellence as a school librarian if I am not naturally an enthusiastic extrovert? <i>Knowledge Quest</i>, 36(1), 70-71.</p> <p>Jones, J., & Bush, G. (2009). What defines an exemplary school librarian? An exploration of professional dispositions. <i>Library Media Connection</i>, 27(6), 10-10-12.</p> <p>Levitov, D. (2007). One library media specialist's journey to understanding advocacy: A tale of transformation. <i>Knowledge Quest</i>, 36(1), 28-31.</p> <p>Martin, A. (2007). The evolution of the librarian as advocate: Are advocates born or developed? <i>Knowledge Quest</i>, 36(1), 16-19.</p> <p>Minkel, W. (2002). Making every librarian a leader. <i>School Library Journal</i>, 48(10), 46-49.</p> <p>Moreillon, J., & Misakian, J. E. (2007). Preservice teacher-librarian education: Learning the character of an advocate. <i>Knowledge Quest</i>, 36(1), 20-23.</p> <p>Schuckett, S. (2007). The making of an advocate: My life in the arena. <i>Knowledge Quest</i>, 36(1), 36-39.</p> <p>Stripling, B. (2007). The dance of leadership and advocacy. <i>Knowledge Quest</i>, 36(1), 54-55.</p>
5 Empirical studies of advocacy	<p>Ewbank, A. D. (2011). Advocacy for the school library media profession: Results of a U.S. national survey. <i>School Libraries Worldwide</i>, 37(2).</p>
6 Evidence-based practice as an advocacy tool	<p>Asselin, M. (2002). Evidence-based practice. <i>Teacher Librarian</i>, 30(1), 53-54.</p> <p>Braxton, B. (2003). Putting evidence-based advocacy to work. <i>Teacher Librarian</i>, 31(2), 41-42.</p> <p>Kenney, B. (2006). Ross to the rescue! Rutgers' Ross Todd's quest to renew school libraries. <i>School Library Journal</i>, 52(4), 44.</p> <p>Loertscher, D. V., & Todd, R. J. (2003). <i>We boost achievement! Evidence-based practice for school librarians</i>. Salt Lake City, UT: Hi Willow Research & Publishing.</p> <p>Logan, D. K. (2006). Being heard... advocacy + evidence + students = impact! <i>School Library Media Activities Monthly</i>, 23(1), 46-48.</p> <p>Todd, R. J. (2003). School libraries evidence: Seize the day, begin the future. <i>Library Media Connection</i>, 22(1), 12-18.</p>

	Todd, R. J. (2006). School libraries and evidence-based practice: An integrated approach to evidence. <i>School Libraries Worldwide</i> , 12(2), 31-37
	Todd, R. J. (2008a). A question of evidence. <i>Knowledge Quest</i> , 37(2), 16-21.
	Todd, R. (2008b). The evidence-based manifesto. <i>School Library Journal</i> , 54(4), 38-43.
7 Legislative or political advocacy	Ewbank, A. D., & Moreillon, J. (2006). The 65% solution is no solution for schools or for library media centers. <i>School Library Media Activities Monthly</i> , 22(10), 22-24.
	Kaaland, C. (2010a). Legislator in the library day: A model for legislative advocacy. <i>School Library Monthly</i> , 26(7), 44-46.
	Lance, K. C. (2006). The outsiders: It's not just the money. <i>School Library Journal</i> , 52(9), 52.
	Young, R. (2009). Attending National Library Legislative Day: Why is it important? <i>Library Media Connection</i> , 27(5), 30-31.
8 Localized reports of advocacy initiatives	Burris, M. (2006). The evolution of an advocacy group: The British Columbia coalition for school libraries. <i>PNLA Quarterly</i> , 70(4), 12-13.
	Logan, D. K. (2009). Making the impossible dream come true: The Ohio quest to serve students. <i>Teacher Librarian</i> , 37(1), 40-42.
	Logan, D. K. (2010). Staying the course: Racing for Ohio's students. <i>Library Media Connection</i> , 28(4), 12-16.
	Meraz, G. (2002). Coming to an ESC near you: Can we talk? Advocacy. <i>Texas Library Journal</i> , 78(3), 120-121.
9 Strategies and techniques for advocacy	Adams, H. R. (2011). The intellectual freedom calendar: Another advocacy plan for the school library. <i>School Library Monthly</i> , 27(7), 52-53.
	Baxter, V. (2007). Library media advocacy through grant writing. <i>School Library Media Activities Monthly</i> , 24(2), 45-47.
	Bush, G. (2007). Telling our school library story. <i>Knowledge Quest</i> , 36(1), 40-43.
	Collins, C. (2010). Survival tactics for the warrior librarian. <i>Library Media Connection</i> , 29(3), 18-19.
	Foote, C. (2010). Everyday advocacy: Making a case for libraries is easy with web tools. <i>School Library Journal</i> , 56(8), 28-30.
	Freda, C. (2007). Promoting your library program: Getting the message out. <i>Knowledge Quest</i> , 36(1), 48-51.
	Hainer, E. (2005). Advocacy: School librarians and advocacy: Part of the problem, or part of the solution? <i>Knowledge Quest</i> , 33(5), 27-29.
	Hand, D. (2008). What can teacher-librarians do to promote their work and the school library media program? Keep everyone in the loop: Constant advocacy. <i>Teacher Librarian</i> , 36(2), 26-27.
	Howard, J. K. (2009). Advocacy through relationships. <i>School Library Monthly</i> , 26(2), 44-45.
	Johnson, D. (2005). When your job is on the line: Strategies for assisting library media specialists whose positions are in jeopardy. <i>Library Media Connection</i> , 23(5), 44.
	Kaaland, C. (2010b). Recruitment to the Profession: A form of advocacy. <i>School Library Monthly</i> , 26(10), 44-46.
	Kaaland, C. (2011). Proactive advocacy: Emergency preparedness for the school library. <i>School Library Monthly</i> , 27(4), 49-51.
	Kelly, S. (2008). Getting a seat at the table--an ongoing effort. <i>School</i>

	<i>Library Media Activities Monthly</i> , 25(3), 23-25.
	Lehman, K. (2002). Promoting library advocacy and information literacy from an invisible library. <i>Teacher Librarian</i> , 29(4), 27-30.
	Leverett, L. (2001). Extending your influence by "spreading the word". <i>Book Report</i> , 20(1), 24-26.
	Levitov, D. D. (2009). Advocacy links...tools to use. <i>School Library Media Activities Monthly</i> , 25(7), 4.
	Schuckett, S. (2005). Be a school library advocate. <i>Library Media Connection</i> , 23(6), 24.
	Terrell, N. (2010). Speaking up. <i>Library Media Connection</i> , 29(1), 28-29.
	Vanneman, S. (2007). Advocacy: Sparks and threads. <i>Knowledge Quest</i> , 35(4), 36-38.
	Wallace, V. (2004). What works? Marketing? Public relations? Yes, and more advocacy background. <i>School Library Media Activities Monthly</i> , 20(9), 49-51.

While there was no clear majority category, the largest number of articles (n=20) described strategies and techniques for advocacy. The next largest categories were using evidence-based practice as an advocacy tool (n=9) and dispositions of school library advocates (n=9). We found one empirical article (Ewbank, 2011) and no theoretical work on school library advocacy.

Next, we began our conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis is a type of content analysis that involves tallying and quantifying the presence of concepts, either implicitly or explicitly stated (Busch, et al, 2005). In this conceptual analysis we examine the methods (types and rates) of advocacy and identify the rationales for advocacy for school library programs within the literature.

Research Question 1: What are the methods of school library advocacy described in the literature?

We found twelve distinct methods of advocacy described in the twenty-seven articles analyzed. Table 2 describes these methods and indicates their frequency in the literature. The most frequent advocacy techniques described are passive in nature (e.g., reading information, collecting evidence).

Table 2. *Frequency of Advocacy Techniques*

Advocacy Technique	Frequency
Read/distribute information on school library advocacy (articles, presentation, post card, websites, email, calls, cards, etc.)	16
Communicate with decision makers	14
Collect evidence, prepare strong resources	12
Attended library legislative days or other organized events	9
Create and share vision and goal	9

Fundraising efforts	9
Collaborate with others and making network	7
Join association and form a task force	7
More professional development	7
Meet regularly with principals and teachers	6
Increase teacher awareness about the school library program through professional development/training	6
Create plan for advocacy	3

We then analyzed a sample of one article from each of the nine initial categories, and constructed a matrix that outlined the actors, stakeholders, goal, effort and result of the advocacy effort. We provide an example of one article's analysis below (Table 3).

Table 3. *Literature Sample in Conceptual Matrix*

Citation	Actors	Stakeholders	Effort	Result
Whelan, 2008	Parents	Public	Blasting emails, online petition and gathering signatures	
			Editorials and letters from Senator and local business leaders in the media	
	Librarians, teachers, and parents		Address the school board in a powerful show of support for their teacher-librarians	
	Parents		Form a group for the advocacy (Washington Coalition for School Libraries & Information Technology)	
	Parents	Public	Reached out to various media outlets (website, blog...)	In less than two weeks, 1,400 people signed their online petition
	Parents	Legislators	Persuade the task force to include library service under the new, expanded definition of basic education	
			Get a chance to apply for a supplemental budget	it made people take notice and put us on the map with key legislators
			Cultivate relationships with Caine and other 'gatekeepers'	
			Community captain (volunteer) stepped forward to promote the cause	

			Elected official joined and become a partner, education committee wrote a letter	
			Numerous call, letters, emails (to legislators)	Education leaders agreed to sponsor a bill to fund school library program

This particular advocacy effort resulted in thousands signing an online petition, obtaining the awareness of key legislators and agreeing to support a bill. The net result of this effort was a provision in the Washington state law that required school librarians to be classified as core teachers and allocated USD\$4 million in support for school libraries across the state (<http://www.fundourfuturewashington.org/16.html>).

This result, however, was an exception. Of the twenty-seven articles analyzed for this paper, only one other article undertaken (Foote, 2010) outlined a tangible result of advocacy efforts. The remainder of the articles described strategies or rationales for advocacy, but did not identify an outcome.

Research Question 2: What are the primary rationales for school library advocacy described in the literature?

We analyzed the rationale for advocacy in each article. We provide an example of the analysis in Table 4 below. In most articles we analyzed, the reason for advocacy typically stemmed from a crisis situation, or a perceived deficit in understanding of the role of the school librarian. Table 4 provides an example of the rationale for articles in five of the initial categories, completed at the time of this writing.

Table 4. *Sample Analysis for Rationale and Reason for Advocacy*

Category	Citation	Title	Reason	Rationale for Advocacy
3	Hartzell, 2007	How do decision-makers become library media advocates?	Most principals don't have a solid understanding of the library and an appreciation of its value	Principals who understand and appreciate the library are more likely to be library advocates
7	Young, 2009	Attending National Library Legislative Day: Why is it important?	Most of the legislative staffers had no idea what a school library is like today	
8	Meraz, 2002	Coming to an ESC	School administrators continue to cut library	The voice of the school librarian is a critical and informed one.

		near you: Can we talk? Advocacy	programs and state funding for technology and resources remains uncertain	
9	Foote, 2010	Everyday advocacy: Making a case for libraries is easy with web tools	Losing their librarian due to budget cuts at state and district level	
9	Freda, 2007	Promoting your library program: Getting the message out	What goes on in them is invisible to the public eye.	The library is an effective vehicle for change and can make a difference in the lives of our students, the school community. and, ultimately, in the future of our society.

The conceptual analysis completed thus far reveals that the primary rationale described in the literature for school library advocacy was a threat of budget reduction or loss of personnel.

As we complete the conceptual analysis, we are also in the preliminary stages of a relational analysis of the literature. Articles analyzed suggest possible reasons for budget reductions or loss of personnel. Reasons cited in the literature include librarians who are “invisible” or do not advocate (N=7), librarians marginalized by educational policies and by ambiguous classifications such as ‘instructional vs. supportive’ (N=5), low expectations for school librarians by administrators or lack of recognition by administrators (N=3), and school librarians have few chances to learn how to be advocates for the program (N=1). It is important to note that the reasons cited in the literature do not infer causation. Our purpose for conducting the relational analysis is to discover how the reasons are portrayed in the literature and are not generalizable.

Conclusion

Our research questions were:

- What are the methods of school library advocacy described in the literature?
- What are the primary rationales for school library advocacy described in the literature?

In this paper, we describe the methods and rationale for school library advocacy found in the content analysis. We found nine categories of articles (see Table 1) and twelve distinct methods of advocacy. Of the articles analyzed thus far, we found that the primary rationale for advocacy was a threat of budget reduction or loss of personnel. We also began

a relational analysis to determine possible reasons for budget reduction or loss of personnel outlined in the literature.

Our next steps are to complete the conceptual analysis based on the *a priori* coding scheme, to conduct a conceptual analysis about the types of advocacy present in the literature based on the definition adopted by the American Association of School Librarians (<http://www.ala.org/aasl/aaslissues/advocacy/definitions>) and to continue the relational analysis, including analysis of the relationship between position elimination or budget reduction and advocacy, and the relationship between the school librarian and school administration.

Based on the data analyzed thus far, we note that advocacy efforts are highly contextualized. The advocacy effort is dependent upon the unique situation, the actors, the stakeholders, and the rationale for advocacy. We also note that the question remains whether the issue of advocacy is inextricably linked to the condition of the school system as well as supports for the school librarian position in each of these contexts. Is the school system truly equitable (Apple, 2006)?

Advocacy is one of the means that human have developed to intervene in in the evolutionary processes of organizations (March, 1994). Organizations evolve when there is disequilibrium in their environments (Baum & Singh, 1994). When organizations question the assumptions, policies, and values that led to a problem, learning through change occurs with repeated attempts are made to solve a problem. Advocacy is a problem-solving process for the entire organization. When actors encounter a threat to the library program, they sometimes attempt to solve this problem with advocacy activities.

However, advocacy can be an uphill battle. Barriers to change in schools include the failure to recognize the vulnerability of the change process to powerful cultural influences (Dooley, 1995). Organizational culture consists of “deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that members have about their organization or its work” (Peterson & Spencer, 1991, p. 142). Most individuals have had some interaction with the public school system (most commonly as a student), and therefore have a stake in creating its culture.

Public education is legitimized by outside forces whose goals are often in philosophical or direct opposition to others’ aims. When educational organizations state that their policies and practices are congruent with stakeholders’ goals, they are rewarded for conforming and are legitimized in the eyes of outside forces (Aldrich, 2000). Some stakeholders wield a more powerful influence than others. Perhaps this is a reason why many advocacy efforts target the legislative process.

We did not conduct a formal literature review, and we are aware of the limitations of this approach. Callison (1998) indicates that while reviews of literature are useful for identifying relationships over time, generalizability should be avoided because of the unique settings, methods employed and other variables related to the literature. Our purpose in conducting the content analysis is to describe the concepts and relationships found within a bounded data set, and readers should not infer generalizability.

In conclusion, it is our hope that this content analysis of the existing literature on advocacy, when complete, will be the beginning of a line of inquiry into how advocacy is positioned in school librarianship. School library researchers should address the dearth of

empirical and theoretical work on both the practice and impact of advocacy on the profession.

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