Teacher Librarians as Connectors to the School CEO

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Forty-nine rural superintendents in two Midwestern states in the USA participated in a qualitative study to investigate how they utilized research and information expertise of teacher librarians to solve district challenges and opportunities. Researchers partnered with six Midwestern regional offices of education who helped facilitate the study’s focus groups. Resulting data indicated that a majority of superintendents were not accessing the expertise of the teacher librarian. They were not familiar with the role of teacher librarians, nor were they familiar with the current research on the importance of school libraries and librarians in advancing student learning and student achievement.

Introduction and Background

The superintendent of schools is the chief executive officer (CEO) of the school district in the United States of America. With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, greater emphasis has been placed on the accountability of superintendents to provide instructional leadership for the school district. “In the current era of legislated accountability, communities and school boards all would like to see better test scores” (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. xiv). School board members and community members expect their superintendent to be well informed on the latest research in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Incumbent on these expectations is the knowledge and skills of the superintendent to access both human and technical information and resources to make the best decisions for the school district. Not only must the superintendent have expertise in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment but also in the areas of finance, student services, facilities, maintenance, and transportation. Superintendents have, at their fingertips, highly qualified school and district teacher librarians who act as agents of knowledge and who can provide the superintendent with up-to-date information to assist in student learning and student achievement as well as overall problem-solving and decision-making.

In The Tipping Point, Gladwell (2005) explained that despite the availability of a wealth of knowledge at one’s fingertips through electronic media, the word-of-mouth epidemic fueled by people who act as “connectors” is significant in world events. The role school and district teacher librarians play as Connectors is significant to a school district’s ability to meet 21st century demands for enhanced student learning. While our electronic connectedness absorbs our time and appears to connect us to all our needs, face-to-face
contact and word-of-mouth connectedness continues to be an essential component in human relationships, which is a critical component in role of the teacher librarian.

Early in the twentieth century, school librarians were the Connectors who connected readers to books. Mid-century, librarians became known as library media specialists who connected students to a variety of media available in school libraries. Today school and district teacher librarians act as Connectors to informational literacy: their role is to advance informational literacy. School-based teacher librarians serve a vital role in assisting students to acquire 21st century skills and, through building collaborative, connected relationships with teachers and administrators, student learning is enhanced.

A plethora of research supports the positive influence quality school library programs and teacher librarians play in advancing student achievement (Ireland, 2001; Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2005; Lance & Hofschire, 2011). Teacher librarians also act as Connectors to superintendents, school board members, and the community at-large. They can search out information for superintendents, help superintendents critically evaluate information, locate and use multiple technological resources, and together with superintendents, synthesize their findings to create new knowledge for decision-making and instructional programs.

The Role of the Teacher Librarian in Relation to the School CEO

The role of the school and district teacher librarian is diverse. He or she is at once a teacher, an instructional partner, an information specialist, and a program administrator (AASL & AECT, 1998). Several of the American Association of School Librarian Standards (AASL, 1999) address the role of the teacher librarian. Standard 1 focuses on accessing information efficiently and effectively. Under this standard, it is the responsibility of the teacher librarian to first recognize the need for information to formulate questions based on the needs, then to identify potential sources of information and develop successful strategies for locating the information from diverse sources. It is also incumbent on the teacher librarian to assist in determining the accuracy, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the information as well as to determine misleading information. They collaborate with teachers, administrators, and others to prepare students for the future (National Commission on Libraries and Information Sciences [NCLIS], 2008).

Teacher librarians play an essential role in the learning community by ensuring that administrators are efficient and effective users of ideas and information. The knowledge of school superintendents is put to the test on a daily basis. Some of the knowledge that impacts decisions is innate, while other knowledge, especially executive decision-making knowledge should be gathered from experts, advisors, mentors, and from the field of current research. Rural superintendents are especially challenged because in many cases they live in remote areas, possess limited resources, and feel isolated and alone in making decisions. Lamkin’s (2006) study of rural superintendents reiterates the concerns of isolationism along with limited resources and adds community resistance to change as an additional factor. She asserts even though superintendents have historically concerned themselves with the success of students, “state and federal governments now rank these small isolated schools against larger schools with more resources and more choices. Rural superintendents thus perceive a change in the level of their personal accountability” (p. 23). The librarian, the connector, can play a vital role in this accountability dilemma by accessing and evaluating information for superintendents of schools.

Challenges of the Teacher Librarian and the School CEO

When a superintendent is faced with a challenge or initiative, the teacher librarian can play a critical role in selecting the appropriate information for the challenges at hand. Another role of the teacher librarian is program administration. More specifically, the teacher librarian needs to develop a relationship with the superintendent and central office staff and meet regularly to market library services.

In Lance and Hofschire’s (2011) most recent research article, Carl Harvey, president of the American Association of School Libraries, is introduced. Harvey articulates his
personal goal is to be an ambassador for school library services and become “the library’s strongest advocate” (p.6). He suggests marketing library services to ensure administrators know a great deal about the services librarians can render. It is also important for teacher librarians to participate in both short- and long-term district strategic planning. The program administration role also emphasizes their importance in offering on-going professional development for administrators and other members of the learning community. Librarians can assist the superintendent in coordinating professional development opportunities that can include curriculum, instruction, and assessment. “With the district’s support the library media specialist organizes and coordinates workshops, models instructional strategies and coaches other teachers. The library media specialist takes a leadership role in professional organizations” (AASL, 1999, n. p.). Budget cuts and economic downturns have affected library services all over the nation, making it of paramount importance for teacher librarians to know how to market their services. Schrock (2003) asserts that marketing is typically not a course of study in library education programs, but needs to be:

Marketing isn’t traditionally taught in library school. But with budget cuts taking center stage nationwide, it’s never been more necessary to promote your program as an integral part of the learning process. Marketing your media center program follows the same basic guidelines found in the business world: create a product that people like, target your advertising, build a base of satisfied customers, take time to manage the details, and grow your programs slowly so that each stage is a success. (Schrock, p. 1)

**Impact of the Teacher Librarian**

There appears to be a lack of information on the part of school superintendents and other administrators with regard to the importance of school libraries and teacher librarians’ roles and responsibilities. Hartzell (2003) asserts a key distinction about their role:

Role expansion allows teacher-librarians to deliver additional important services, such as research support for administrators. Freed from clerical duties, ... librarians can draw on the Internet and subscription databases to support principals with up-to-the-minute information on any given topic ... Consistent access to such information can only result in improved administrative decision-making. (p. 21)

Hartzell (2003) asserts that over fifty years of research illuminating the importance of the library media specialist has failed to reach the administrative ranks regarding the services librarians can provide administrators and the impact they can have on student learning: teacher librarians have “a discernable positive impact on student achievement regardless of student, school, and community demographics” (p. 21). One of the most prolific researchers on this topic, Keith Curry Lance, in one of his seminal studies speaks to the critical connection between exemplary library services and higher student achievement in Colorado. Studies of the connection between library information services and student achievement in twenty-one other states where Lance encouraged studies demonstrated the critical tie exemplary library services have to student achievement. Illinois and Iowa were among these states. **Powerful Libraries Make Powerful Learners: The Illinois Study** (Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2005) was funded by the Illinois School Library Media Association and a 2004 Illinois Library Services and Technology Grant. The fall 2003 survey gathered information from 657 Illinois school libraries.

Among the conclusions from the study are two points related to staffing school libraries and the role of the librarian. “At all grade levels, test scores tend to be higher ... where school libraries are staffed more fully and where school librarians spend more time collaborating with classroom teachers...” (p. 120). Catapulting student achievement to enhance global competition is crucial to the superintendent’s role now and will be in the future.
A Critical Link
While this study gathered valuable information supporting the link between library information services and student achievement, an annual report from the Illinois State Board of Education revealed this powerful link is endangered because of a shortage of teacher librarians. The 2004 Illinois Educator Supply and Demand Report (ISBE, 2004) noted 74 unfilled teacher librarian positions in the state. Teacher librarians were fourth out of five areas of greatest need among unfilled positions in the state (p. iv). As well, 216 Illinois school districts reported a shortage of qualified teacher librarian applicants (p. 12). The most recent Illinois Educator Supply and Demand Report (ISBE, 2008) published in 2008 indicates the shortage continues with 244 districts reporting a shortage of qualified teacher librarians (p. vii).

However, the number of unfilled teacher librarian positions is only 47 (p. 19). How can this be? Districts are simply not filling teacher librarian positions, but instead are replacing certified library media specialists with clerks or aides, or districts are cutting library media specialists from their budgets. Columns 1, 2, and 3 of Table 1 compare numbers of staff in Illinois schools over an eight-year period. The numbers reveal instructional staff and school service personnel increasing in number while other certified staff, including teacher librarians, are decreasing. It appears that, if certified library media specialists cannot be found, library services may be covered by a non-certified employee, typically a paraprofessional or aide. When these figures are coupled with the numbers in Columns 4 and 5, unfilled teacher librarian positions and the number of districts reporting a shortage of librarian/media specialist applicants, the assumption that teacher librarian positions are being filled with persons other than certified teacher librarian is further justified. A shortage of applicants continues while the number of unfilled positions has not grown, decreasing the overall number of Other Certified Staff in the state (Illinois Board of Education, 2002-2008) as Table 1 illustrates.

Table 1: Number of Staff, Unfilled Positions, and Districts Reporting Shortage of Applicants in Illinois 2002-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report Year</th>
<th>Full Time Instructional Staff</th>
<th>Full Time Other Certified Staff (Coordinators, Consultants, Teacher Librarians)</th>
<th>Full Time School Service Personnel (Psychologists, Social Workers, Counselors, Nurses)</th>
<th>Unfilled Teacher Librarian Positions in State</th>
<th>Districts Reporting Shortage of Teacher Librarian Applicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>127,323</td>
<td>5,377</td>
<td>7,743</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>127,408</td>
<td>4,505</td>
<td>7,910</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>130,773</td>
<td>4,633</td>
<td>8,041</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>122,040</td>
<td>4,543</td>
<td>8,900</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>128,497</td>
<td>5,097</td>
<td>10,465</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>245</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>127,130</td>
<td>5,156</td>
<td>10,401</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>129,068</td>
<td>3,998</td>
<td>11,011</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>131,478</td>
<td>3,836</td>
<td>11,225</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An Ongoing Debate
These shortages beg the question: If superintendents were familiar with the services and responsibilities that teacher librarians can perform, not only for students and teachers but also for them, would superintendents begin to advocate and employ more of these professionals in the school district? If the research clearly supports teacher librarians as key individuals who perform very valuable services to support student learning and student achievement in school districts, then why would superintendents and other administrators not support the essential role and responsibilities they can play in a school district?

A case in point regarding the lack of knowledge superintendents have regarding the vital services of teacher librarians occurred in Illinois surrounding a proposed amendment to the rules governing teacher librarians in public schools in Illinois. The Illinois
Administrative Code, amended and effective July 28, 2005, required “no individual shall be assigned to provide library and audio-visual services to students, teachers and other school personnel unless he or she holds a certificate that is valid for the grade level or levels of the students to be served” (Joint Committee on Administrative Rules [JCAR], I-1.750). In addition, the rules proposed, “Each school district shall provide a program of library media services for the students in each of its schools” (JCAR, I-1.420). Districts that could not find certified teacher librarians found themselves unable to fill these positions. In some cases, districts could continue to advertise for qualified candidates and in the meantime fill the position on a temporary basis. If districts were unsuccessful in finding qualified candidates, the position was probably cut from the budget.

By the fall of 2007, school districts’ accreditation was being questioned surrounding the issues of employing qualified teacher librarians and providing programs of media services in each attendance center. This concern was addressed by a proposed amendment to Illinois Administrative Code calling for a certified library media specialist in every attendance center. The Notice of Proposed Amendment includes the following intent, “To ensure that what is known about effective library media services is brought to bear on the achievement of Illinois students” (Illinois Register, 2007, p. 15031), but the proposed amendment includes this disclaimer, “Currently, insufficient numbers of library media professionals are being prepared for service in Illinois schools” (Illinois Register, 2007, p. 15031). While the intent of the rule is noble, the ability to implement the rule is questionable. Without a significant increase in the number of certified school librarians, the shortage may not be overcome. The public education proposed rule was expected to leverage program changes in higher education, as its explanation includes:

A rule requiring specified levels of staffing will establish a demand for trained professionals and, over time, would be expected to lead to an increase in the number of approved preparation programs and the number of certified teacher librarians. (Illinois Register, 2007, p. 15031)

Librarians throughout the state of Illinois were encouraged to write to the Illinois State Board of Education in support of the rule change. The Illinois School Library Media Association and the Illinois Library Association wrote letters in support of the rule change. School administrators throughout the state wrote as well, but in opposition to the rules based upon their inability to find qualified, certified teacher librarians. Their response was also based on their failure to recognize the important role teacher librarians play in student achievement. The amendment failed.

The number of teacher librarians in schools is dwindling. Kaplan’s (2006) study of Delaware principals’ attitudes towards teacher librarians cites a principal’s comment indicating media centers in Delaware are a casualty of their school budget crises. From New York (Frenette, 2010) to California (Lopez, 2011), school districts have cut in past years and continue to cut teacher librarians from their budgets. In some districts the cuts are removing library aides as well. “AASA [American Association of School Administrators] projects 19 percent of the nation’s school districts will have fewer librarians next year [2010-2011]” (eSchool News, 2010).

The casualties are mounting, and the research grows. Lance and Hofschire’s (2011) most recent research finding is characterized as “groundbreaking.” They used National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) that correlated fourth-grade reading scores from 2004-2009 to the reduction in numbers of school librarians across the states. Their study concluded:

Our research also indicates that these lower reading scores can’t be blamed on cuts to other school staff. Regardless of whether there were fewer classroom teachers schoolwide, students in states that lost librarians tended to have lower reading scores—or had a slower rise on standardized tests—than those in states that gained librarians. (Lance & Hofschire, 2011, n.p.)

It would be naïve to assume if a school program is proven to improve student achievement, school budgets would reflect the efficacy of the program to support student
The focus on teaching in core subject areas for the purpose of preparing students to meet or exceed on state standardized tests is resulting in peripheral programs of study being eliminated as school districts across the nation struggle to balance their budgets. Often administrators are searching for the “magic bullet”, another program, when years of research demonstrate an effective library information program garners higher student achievement.

Library information programs across the country certainly have the research to support the value of their existence. But have the teacher librarians asserted their role as program administrators, as Gladwell’s Connectors, to clearly articulate their roles, relationships, and responsibilities to the district decision makers to leverage support? Answering this question became the basis for further study among school superintendents.

The research study had a threefold purpose: to determine if superintendents were familiar with the research published in *School Libraries Work!*, to determine their reaction to the document, and to determine if superintendents were utilizing the expertise of school and district library media specialists in finding research studies to investigate current and future school or district initiatives.

**Methods**

The study focused on finding answers to the following research questions:

1. Were superintendents familiar with the research connecting higher student achievement with schools having library media specialists and library programs, as described in *School Libraries Work!* (NCLIS, 2008).
2. When made aware of the research in *School Libraries Work!*, what reaction did superintendents have related to their school library media programs, their library media specialists, and student achievement in their schools? When and for what reasons did superintendents utilize the expertise of their teacher librarians?

Focus group research was the chosen methodology to determine superintendents’ understanding of current research related to school libraries and student achievement and of their utilization of librarian services. Focus group research is qualitative research, “exploratory, with its intention to provide an understanding of perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and motivations” (Edmunds, 1999, p. 3). Focus group research is conducted as an in-person question and answer session with a specific topic addressed among members of the group.

The geographical location of the researchers in west-central Illinois, living among rural school districts and teaching at a state university that served students from Iowa and Illinois, led to determining a target population of rural superintendents from eastern Iowa and west-central Illinois. Easiest access to groups of superintendents in Iowa and in Illinois is through Regional Superintendents and Agency Directors. In December 2008 and January 2009 researchers contacted four Regional Superintendents in west-central Illinois and two Area Education Agency Directors in eastern Iowa to request their help in conducting the research. Working with the Regional Superintendents and Agency Directors allowed the researchers to have access to groups of administrators from rural districts who could respond to questions about library services in an environment where they would feel comfortable responding honestly (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The researchers requested the opportunity to conduct focus groups with superintendents at a monthly meeting.

The Regional Superintendents and Area Education Agency Directors offered their support and cooperation by sending a letter of support of the study along with related documents to the superintendents who would be attending. The related document superintendents were requested to read before coming to the focus groups was *School Libraries Work!* Six focus groups with forty-nine rural superintendents were conducted in January, February, and March 2009. Eleven rural Illinois counties and 20 rural Iowa counties were represented among the participants.

A limitation of the research study’s focus group design is the ability of individual focus group members to respond credibly to the *School Libraries Work* document if they had not read the document before the focus group discussion. Another limitation of the study is that conclusions from these focus groups may not represent the larger population of rural school superintendents in Iowa and Illinois.
Researchers developed an interview protocol consisting of nine questions along with observation protocol for notes regarding the behaviors of the superintendents (Creswell, 2008). The following questions created the framework for the study’s focus groups. The order of questions followed Krueger and Casey’s (2000) guidelines for the “Questioning Route” (p. 42) proceeding from a conversation about the research to specific kinds of research superintendents conduct and how they utilize the expertise of school librarians.

1. Were you familiar with the findings from School Libraries Work?
2. How did you react to the research findings about teacher librarians in the document that was sent to you? What action do you think needs to be taken?
3. What was it about what you read in this research document that made it persuasive? What was the most compelling aspect of this study?
4. How did it compare to other studies that have influenced your thinking and decision making?
5. What would a more compelling research study about school libraries and librarians look like to you?
6. Can you give examples of research studies and other resources that were especially helpful to you in making important decisions? How did you find out about them?
7. When and why do you turn to research to help you make decisions?
8. In the past two years, has the expertise of a librarian, aided the district in finding research studies to investigate a current or future set of initiatives or challenges for a district or school?
9. Are there other issues related to this research? Is there anything else you would like to share?

The focus group questions and answers were audio-recorded and observational notes were taken as well. Transcriptions of the audio recordings were made and analyzed utilizing the methods outlined by Krueger and Casey (2000). Each researcher read through each transcription, highlighting salient themes in the responses that reflected the study’s purpose. Researchers compared and contrasted notes on the responses to each question for each group and for the total group. Responses and notes on responses were critiqued. Common responses generated themes of information and were aggregated for each question. Clusters and themes that emerged from the data were interpreted as findings. Limitations centered on district location, similarity of background of administrators, years of experience in the superintendency, superintendents’ educational background and training and their ability to translate the research into practical application in their school district.

Focus Group Results

Focus Group Question One: Were you familiar with the findings from School Libraries Work?

None of the participants in the focus groups had seen this document or were familiar with the research in this document prior to reading School Libraries Work! The researchers restated the question, “Your response tells us that you were not familiar with the research articulated in the School Libraries Work! document?” One superintendent did offer, “I hear librarians always harping about that. They say that schools that have certified librarians have achievement that is higher.” Overall, the superintendents were unaware of the research in this document that links higher student achievement to school library services.

Focus Group Question Two: How did you react to the research findings about school librarians in the document that was sent to you? What action do you think needs to be taken?

Superintendents questioned the reliability and validity of the research, relative to the correlation between size of school districts, their locations, and their tax bases to achievement levels. The document clearly indicated a “direct correlation can be made between student achievement and school library programs led by library media specialists” (NCLIS, p. 9). In addition, superintendents mentioned the limited candidate pool, the difficulty acquiring certification, the caliber of current librarians in the field, and the current
inability to utilize a grow-your-own model in a district as well as the financial implications for hiring teacher librarians.

**Focus Group Question Three: What was it about what you read in this research document that made it persuasive? What was the most compelling aspect of this study?**

Superintendents found the research persuasive given that it reflected studies from twenty-one states and was of significant volume. They found most compelling the library program’s direct impact on reading and writing achievement and the importance of librarian and teacher collaboration. It was apparent that administrators had gained this knowledge as a result of reading the document, but their teacher librarians who had this knowledge had not promoted this as an important aspect of their work.

**Focus Group Question Four: How did it compare to other studies that have influenced your thinking and decision-making?**

Many of the superintendents had difficulty referencing other research studies to compare to this study. However, superintendents from one state referenced research related to instructional strategies, balanced leadership training, and efficacy of instructional rounds. The consensus among many members of the focus groups was they had greater insight as to what an effective library program and teacher librarian can provide to a district and its achievement level as a result of reading School Libraries Work! Another noteworthy conclusion among superintendents was they needed to rethink the role and responsibilities teacher librarians should be fulfilling in their districts. From their remarks, it was apparent some administrators regarded teacher librarians as “keepers of the books” rather than as leaders of learning and information specialists.

**Focus Group Question Five: What would a more compelling research study about school libraries and librarians look like to you?**

Superintendents responded with several suggestions. They wanted researchers to disaggregate the data by socioeconomic status and by per pupil expenditures, as well as to research the utilization of technological tools and student achievement. They also responded by suggesting research be disaggregated by rural, urban, and suburban school districts. In addition, they felt a compelling research study would be to look at the library services in high achieving schools in their states. They also wanted a research study that highlights the roles, relationships, and responsibilities of school librarians comparing their effectiveness. Studying the role of the teacher librarian beyond the four walls in collaboration and partnering with town and other school libraries was of interest as well.

**Focus Group Question Six: Can you give examples of research studies and other resources that were especially helpful to you in making important decisions? How did you find out about them?**

Superintendents relied heavily upon professional journals, professional organization websites, podcasts, videos, and DVDs. They found out about these resources through local, regional, and state conferences and networking. Several superintendents commented they would like to see a study conducted on the responsibilities of superintendents. They asserted a similar study should be conducted on libraries concerning the services they are supposed to render at the school and district levels.

**Focus Group Question Seven: When and why do you turn to research to help you make decisions?**

Respondents offered they turn to research when their ideas are being challenged and when they need to make informed decisions. They also articulated they accessed research to give the district “an edge up” and to gain more in-depth knowledge as well as to back up an idea for a district/school initiative, to design innovative program changes, and to investigate what other districts are doing to advance student learning and student achievement.
Focus Group Question Eight: In the past two years, has the expertise of a librarian aided the district in finding research studies to investigate a current or future set of initiatives or challenges for a district or school?

Forty-eight superintendents responded “No” to this question. They had not accessed the expertise of a school or district teacher librarian to assist them in finding research to investigate a current or future set of initiatives or challenges for the district. Only one superintendent responded “Yes”. He frequently asked the school teacher librarian to provide materials to aid his research and claims she responded immediately with volumes of materials. Other superintendents commented the teacher librarians are not viewed in the district as the persons to go to for research. Other superintendents suggested they accessed information as needed on their own, since it was at their fingertips through Internet resources such as Google.

Focus Group Question Nine: Are there other issues related to this research? Is there anything else you would like to share?

Superintendents found the research and the discussion on the impact of student achievement enlightening. They expressed a critical need for better understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and collaborative relationships of the school librarian. In addition, they suggested specific evaluation criteria be in place to monitor and evaluate performance of school teacher librarians. They recommended the development of a performance evaluation instrument. Superintendents also noted the importance of promoting the collaboration between classroom teachers and teacher librarian. Other issues and challenges they shared concerned funding to support hiring teacher librarians and collection development in the libraries and the rethinking of the redistribution of school libraries and utilization of public libraries to enhance delivery of services. One critical problem addressed was the lack of a good evaluation instrument for teacher librarians, specifically addressing the current AASL standards.

Discussion and Conclusions

A wealth of research clearly indicates that library media services and the contributions of the teacher librarian have a positive effect on student achievement. Our study indicates that rural superintendents in Iowa and Illinois superintendents may have overlooked their important role in advancing this achievement. Recent research consistently reveals administrators are not well informed nor do they fully understand the role of the teacher librarian (Kaplan, 2006; Lau, 2002; Shannon, 2009).

Active advocacy for library programs and critical, informative conversations about library services with administrators are essential. As Lance (2011) points out “It’s not good enough to say children really love coming to the library” (n. p.). The focus group results support Hartzell’s (2002) claim that the school librarians these administrators knew when they were students are not the teacher librarians we should be seeing in schools today. They know librarians as “keepers of the books,” rather than as Connectors in the information age, as they must be considered today. The superintendents’ answers revealed a lack of knowledge about the research that ties effective library media services to higher student achievement. As well, their remarks revealed a reluctance to trust the research findings because of their perceptions of the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of the teacher librarian and because of differences among schools, districts, and populations. Superintendents in these focus groups noted barriers which were thought to be specific to their rural areas: limited candidate pool, caliber of some current school teacher librarians, and the financial implications of keeping a teacher librarian or keeping a classroom teacher.

Superintendents in this study were not aware of the national research concerning the impact of school library media programs on student achievement or research specific to their state. The document they were asked to read, School Libraries Work!, had been distributed to all superintendents in the state of Illinois in January 2009, yet none of the Illinois superintendents recalled reading it. In an article entitled “Where does your authority come
from?” Zmuda (2006), suggested that the authority for librarians to become instructional leaders in student achievement did not come from administration but from librarians asserting themselves into an achievement-centered partnership between the librarian and classroom teachers. Zmuda makes the case for empowering librarians to seize “the authority to work with students in a rigorous, relevant, and consistent manner” (p. 22).

Teacher librarians and the administrators who supervise them are the empowering agents. Administrators must establish clear standards of performance for librarians and assess and evaluate their performance with formative and summative feedback. The Illinois Linking for Learning (ISLMA, 2010) document, The Teacher Librarian Evaluation Tool, clearly spells out the roles and responsibilities of teacher librarians in the following categories: Teaching for Learning; Learning Environment; and Leadership (pp. 35-41). A rubric accompanies the tool to assist administrators in establishing targets for improvement as well as highlighting exemplary performance. Administrators must further carry out the authority to remediate or terminate librarians who do not or may not meet the standard. As Kaplan (2006) points out in her study of Delaware principals’ attitudes towards library media services, “the library media specialist must be able to articulate how collaboration can help in meeting the needs of the classroom teacher and the school curriculum” (p. 37). Hartzell (2002) as well indicates “few teacher-training programs contain any systematic instruction in how librarians might contribute to school effectiveness” (p. 1).

Superintendents in this study were unaware of the role teacher librarians play in leveraging student achievement by the kinds of services they offer and the degree to which they collaborate with teachers and administrators in providing instructional services. Superintendents did not see school librarians as researchers who could provide expertise, service, and access when researching school initiatives. They appeared to rely upon their own skills when searching for materials to support their understanding, learning, or decision-making. Kuhlthau (1985) has studied the skills related to and the process involved in searching for information. From her study she asserts most researchers encounter a roadblock in their searching, where the informational power of the librarian is a valuable intercession. The model Kuhlthau promotes, which can be applied to persons of all ages and backgrounds, encourages the engagement of the school library media specialist in helping researcher in moving from finding “relevant information” to finding “pertinent information” (p. 36). This model suggests how superintendents might use the expertise of school library media specialists to increase their resourcefulness as decision-makers.

**Recommendations**

Resulting from this study are recommendations for library media specialists, teacher and administrator preparation programs, and administrators.

1. Library media specialists must promote the research which supports their roles and library programs as significant factors in student achievement among district stakeholders;
2. Teacher preparation and administrator preparation programs must expose aspiring teachers and administrators to the role they should expect library media specialists to assume in supporting student achievement;
3. Districts must develop and use job descriptions and evaluations to define and assess the roles of library media specialists and their programs; and
4. Districts having difficulty filling library media specialist positions with qualified candidates must consider a ‘grow-your-own’ model, identifying teachers who understand and can model the effective relationship among library media services, classroom instruction, and student achievement.

As Ireland (2001) pointed out, research about the connection between quality library media programs and student achievement is typically shared by teacher librarians in their presentations and their journal articles with other teacher librarians. Teacher librarians must publicize their research among teachers, administrators and board members and present at national administrator and school board conferences. Boards of education need to be receiving regular reports on library programs, their services, and their integration into academic programs in their schools. Research concerning the impact of school on student achievement needs to become a part of school improvement planning meetings. Empowering
Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs (AASL, 2009) is a publication that could be of use for many school improvement planning meetings.

There should be an expectation that teachers integrate library services into their curriculum. Hartzell (2002) suggests this is the often-overlooked responsibility of teacher preparation programs which should “contain systematic instruction in how librarians might contribute to school effectiveness” (p. 1). Educational leadership programs for aspiring administrators should be certain to include the integration of library programs in curriculum design and development. Graduate degree and certification programs for principals and superintendents should include in the coursework a review of relevant literature regarding the importance of library media programs and students’ achievement and the integration of library media services in a school’s broader curriculum (Kaplan, 2006). Aspiring administrators should have instruction to become knowledgeable about the roles and responsibilities of teacher librarian s resulting in the expectation of evaluation specific to teacher librarians. They must understand the instructional role of librarians as well as the Connector role to maximize student learning and student achievement.

Schools and districts need documents that clearly outline the roles, responsibilities, and collaborative relationships of the school librarian. Evaluation instruments should be designed specifically for librarians aligned to the roles and responsibilities of effective librarians and aligned to measurable performance goals.

District administrators need to explore alternative options for finding certified librarians or growing their own librarians in hard-to-staff areas. Research by Drake (2007) made an important distinction about teacher librarians’ practices of teaching and instructional partnering. His research found “teaching certification is important to both teaching and instructional partnering” (p. 194). The certification process which requires coursework in curriculum and instruction as well as practice in the field provides a basis for understanding a developing partnership between teachers and teacher librarians. The grow-your-own teacher librarian from among the ranks of teachers encourages administrators to find teacher leaders who fully understand the integration of effective library services with classroom instruction who can become candidates for teacher librarian certification.

References


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