In efforts to enhance school library programs in Germany, two teacher librarians from Germany visited the United States in the fall of 2010 through the Goethe Institute's Librarian in Residence program to learn from U.S. teacher librarians. The German teacher librarians spent three weeks observing best practices in school libraries in the state of Florida in conjunction with researchers from the Florida State University. Then in 2011, the researchers traveled to Germany to observe and document the implementation efforts and the practices of teacher librarians in various locations in Germany including Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Berlin. The purpose of this research was to investigate this international exchange of best practices, through documenting and analyzing the German teacher librarians' learning experiences, and the resulting implementation of the best practices in multiple school situations in Germany. This report of phase three of this research follows up with the two German participants to gain a sense of the long-term effect of this exchange of best practices.

Introduction

In the fall of 2010, as a part of the Librarian-In-Residence program sponsored by the Goethe Institute, two German teacher librarians spent three weeks visiting American school libraries in the state of Florida with the purpose of observing best practices in information literacy instruction and teacher/librarian collaboration in order to return and implement these practices in German school libraries. The researcher spent three weeks with the librarians and data were collected throughout their stay in the United States. Then, as follow-up research, the researcher traveled to Germany in 2011 to observe and document the implementation efforts and the practices of teacher librarians in various locations in Germany including Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Berlin.

Research was conducted to investigate an international exchange of best practices related to teacher librarianship. In the first two phases of this research the learning experiences of the two German teacher librarians while in the United States was documented and analyzed. In phase two of this research the implementation of the best practices in multiple school situations in Germany were examined. In this follow up research, interviews were conducted with the two German teacher librarians now six years later to gain a sense of the long-term effect of this exchange of best practices.

Background

In the years preceding the initial research, there were many developments in teacher librarianship in Germany. Many education theorists attributed these changes to the 2000 Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) results that suggested shortcomings of the German
educational system because Germany was ranked number 21 out of 32 countries overall, with relatively low average reading achievement (OECD, 2001). As a result, German policymakers searched for the reason behind these disappointing results, and librarians and their professional organizations seized the opportunity to advocate for their programs, including teacher librarians (Krueger, 2003; Schneider & von Jordan-Bonin, 2007). It was the 2000 scores and the progressive movement by the teacher librarians that attracted the attention of the Goethe Institute’s Librarian in Residence program.

PISA is an international standardized test that measures and compares the knowledge of students in 32 countries. The test has three areas: reading literacy, mathematical literacy, and scientific literacy. The test questionnaire also contains questions about school environments. School libraries provide an environment for learning not only in the reading literacy area of the test but also in the scientific literacy area in that school libraries teach students to locate, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information, activities which are very much part of scientific literacy.

In 2000, PISA data on students’ use of the school library showed that 73% of German students never use the school library – the highest percentage for the countries included in the study (Dobert & Sroka, 2004; OECD, 2001). Though it must also be noted that at this time, only 15% of Germany’s schools had a school library that met professional standards (Giersberg, 2012; Schneider & von Jordan-Bonin, 2007), this may be attributed to the fact that the federal government is not responsible for school libraries so it differs from state to state how school libraries are handled and if they exist at all (Giersberg, 2010). It was this data from the 2000 PISA report, deemed “the PISA shock” in Germany that served as a catalyst for German teacher librarians to more actively promote the value and worth of school libraries.

In examining the higher scoring countries in 2000, such as Scandinavian countries, it was found that they had “highly functional public and school libraries at their disposal” (Dankert, 2005, p. 315). While there are public libraries in Germany, there was very little cooperation between the schools and the public libraries noted. This led to steps to further expand the cooperation between schools and public libraries and also establish school libraries as an essential component in addressing Germany’s educational deficits (Dankert, 2005).

Since those PISA findings there have been changes in Germany, including the gradual shift to all-day school in some of the Federal States; a paradigm shift in regards to instruction from teacher-focused to student-centered; and a focus on self-motivated learning using a variety of types of media. Leaders in teacher librarianship in Germany assert that these goals “cannot be achieved without providing modern and well-equipped school libraries” (Giersberg, 2010; Schneider & von Jordan-Bonin, 2007, para. 4). As a result, school libraries have received support from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research’s nationwide initiative Future Education and Support (Giersberg, 2010). Additionally, the German Library Association established a “Library and School” commission, consisting of librarians and teachers, to address issues related to school libraries. This commission has created a school library curriculum that includes numerous best practice case studies, promotes information literacy as an essential learning goal, and highlights how school libraries can help achieve this goal (Giersberg, 2010).

The Librarian in Residence Program

To promote and support cooperation, along with an exchange of experiences between librarians and information professionals from Germany and abroad, the Goethe Institute and the Library and Information International (BI International) agency created the Librarian in Residence program (Doellgast, 2012). In 2010, due to the recent discussions about all day school, life-long learning,
consequences of the 2000 and 2009 PISA results, and the professional debate surrounding school libraries, the Librarian in Residence program decided to focus on teacher librarianship.

The Goethe-Institute Librarian in Residence program, in collaboration with Florida State University, offered two German specialists in the field of school libraries an opportunity to travel to the United States and spend several weeks visiting school libraries, meeting teacher librarians, and participating in workshops and conferences to learn about school libraries in the United States. Helga Hofmann of the School Library Department in Frankfurt and Julia Rittel, head of the library of the professional colleges of the Rhein-Sieg District were selected as the two Librarian-in-Residence participants for 2010.

**Continued Challenges**

Despite the push for changes as a result of the 2000 PISA shock, in 2012 it was reported that “only 5% of all public schools have school libraries” in Germany (Lux, 2012, p. 180). Schlamp finds that German school libraries are said to range from “mere loan libraries in the basement of a school to high performing multimedia information centers” (as cited in Mertes, 2014, p. 5). Some schools have a collection of books and other media, yet are only supported by parent and volunteers, not a teacher librarian (Lux, 2012; Schneider, as cited in Mertes, 2014). Some attribute this to the fact that Germany is a federal republic consisting of 16 federal states, which have “legislative and administrative power over educational policy within their geographical area,” this is also true for support for school libraries, which varies considerably across German States (European Literacy Policy Network, 2016, p. 5). In many areas, public libraries and librarians are responsible for setting up and running school libraries. But still, the majority of schools do not have a well-equipped and well-staffed library (Schlamp, as cited in Mertes, 2014). Lux (2012) attributes this to a civil hierarchy where “librarians and teachers often have a different status, and hence, schools do not usually have the means for employing a librarian for the school” (p. 180).

In the 2015/2016 Report on the State of Libraries (2016), by the German Library Association (dbv), The Federal Government’s digital agenda and a decision by the Conference of Education Ministers in March 2012 were highlighted. This agenda calls for “media education in schools, in order to firmly establish media education as an area of study. Media literacy should also be taught in schools as a fourth core subject, alongside reading, writing and arithmetic” (dbv, 2016, p. 7). Media literacy or media competence is often used in Germany to refer to information literacy (Mertes, 2014). The German Library Association defines the Association of School Libraries as “a lynchpin of media education work. It therefore calls for these libraries to be given the necessary media infrastructure and appropriately qualified staff” (dbv, 2017, p. 7). Despite the decision to initiate the curricula in all Federal States to promote media literacy, there remains “lack of specialist media teachers who could identify schools’ needs and implement this training programme” (p. 7). Fritz observed that teacher librarian - teacher collaborations, during which they plan and teach units together as equal partners, which is vital for integrating media literacy across the subject content areas does not exist in Germany (as cited in Mertes, 2014). German students are regularly assigned research projects during their school career and in several states these research projects are requirements for graduating from high school. Mertes (2014) asserts that students need the assistance that a teacher librarian within the school building can provide. Her findings in regards to information literacy instruction conclude that teacher librarians “provide pedagogical interventions not only for information finding but for the majority of information literacy components, including knowledge building, when students undertake extended projects” (Mertes, 2014, p. 391).

Integrating technology should be a major part of developing this media literacy, yet it was found that German students have to “rely more on private resources than school support to
acquire digital literacy... with an average of 83.2% of the student population reporting that they spend no time at all on computers during German lessons, the lessons most likely to be dedicated to literacy acquisition on computers” (European Literacy Policy Network, 2016, p. 11). In response to this this critical need, the dbv proposed three principles for future school library work in the 2015/2016 Report on the State of Libraries:

1 - The school library should become the school’s media hub.
2 - The school library must be used as a flexible learning environment.
3 - The school library needs to be managed by a media education professional who unlocks the library’s educational potential in collaboration with all those responsible for teaching and school life.” (p. 7)

Research Procedure and Data Collection

In order to determine how teacher librarians and school library programs can benefit from a formal international exchange of best practices, this research was initially conducted in two phases. This third phase of the research examines the effects of this exchange of best practices six years later. An overview of the data collection and findings from phase one and two are provided here as background.

Phase One Overview & Findings

First during the fall of 2010 the researcher, along with Dr. Nancy Everhart of Florida State University, scheduled visits to 15 schools across the state of Florida - six elementary schools (grades K-5), three middle schools (grades 6-8), and six high schools (grades 9-12). These schools were selected based on the recommendations of their district supervisors and state professional organizations as libraries noted for excellent programs. The purposively selected schools span a range of grade levels including elementary and secondary schools located in differing socio-economic communities. The researcher also requested that the teacher librarian in the sample school schedule the visit for a time that he or she would be actively instructing students.

In preparation for the school visits the researcher and Dr. Everhart created an observation questionnaire, which asked the two German teacher librarian participants to comment on various practices they observed and what they learned through their discussions with the teacher librarians. There were questions relating to operating procedures, staffing, finances, the collection, technology, facilities, instruction, and services offered. But, there were also questions that asked them to observe what types of activities were going on in the library and what roles, if any, the teacher and the teacher librarian were undertaking. The two participants filled out an observation questionnaire for each school that was visited.

Additionally, after each school visit the researcher conducted informal debriefing interviews with the two German teacher librarian participants. An interview questionnaire was created with open-ended questions that were more reflective in nature and allowed the participants to express their thoughts and reactions to what they observed during the visits that day (Creswell, 2009). The two participants were also asked questions in regards to the practices they observed, the feasibility of implementing these practices in their school libraries in Germany, and challenges they expected to encounter. It also provided a time for the researcher to clarify items for the two participants. It should be noted here that the two participants spoke fluent English and all interviews were conducted in English.
Utilizing the interview questionnaire and following semi-structured interview protocol, the researcher met with the two participants each evening after the school visits. Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to expand on their responses and also ask the interviewer questions. Additionally, by conducting the interviews as a group it allowed the participants to interact and bring about richer dialog (Creswell, 2009). These interviews were all recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Finally, the Librarian in Residence program required the two participants to blog about their experiences and interactions with school libraries and teacher librarians on the program website and these posts were included in the data collected.

This exploratory research utilized inductive qualitative content analysis, in that themes and categories emerged from the data through the researcher’s careful examination, interpretation, and constant comparison (Glaser, 1965; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The researcher utilizing open coding, therefore notes and topic headings were grouped according to those that were similar under higher order themes. Then through the abstraction process and researcher interpretation, each category or theme was given a name using content-characteristic words (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The researcher then followed this same process with the observation questionnaires and the blog postings of the two participants, while also comparing them for similarities and differences (Glaser, 1965). In order to strengthen credibility, the researcher implemented member checking throughout the data collection and data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The themes emerged from consistent phrases, expressions, or ideas that were common among the participants (Creswell, 2009) and were derived directly and inductively from analyzing the observation questionnaire, the interview transcripts, and the blog postings from the two participants. As expected themes related to practices of teacher librarians emerged: collaboration, information literacy instruction, reading promotion, technology integration, social media, learning environment, stakeholder support, and advocacy. These themes not only represented what practices were most frequently observed, but also reflected what the participants were the most interested in learning about.

Phase Two Overview & Findings
In the summer of 2011, the researcher, with partial support from the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) Takeshi Murofushi Research Grant, went to Germany to follow up with the two participants to establish which best practices observed in the United States were implemented, those that had been most useful in their practice, those that had not, what challenges they had experienced, and to document the progress of this exchange of best practices.

In the weeks preceding the trip to Germany the researcher conducted virtual informal semi-structured interviews with the two participants, who reported about their implementation and dissemination efforts in regards to what they had learned during their time in American school libraries. These interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Each participant also submitted a document that listed and described each practice she had implemented since her return to Germany.

The researcher, along with Dr. Everhart, performed site observations at a variety of school libraries in Frankfurt and Hamburg, including both elementary and secondary schools. In Frankfurt the researcher visited two secondary schools and spent time observing and interviewing the teacher librarians. Additionally, the researcher visited government-established library departments that provide services to school libraries in Frankfurt and interviewed the librarians who worked there. In Hamburg two elementary level schools were visited and the researcher again conducted informal semi-structured interviews with the teacher librarians; during one visit three additional teacher librarians from the Hamburg area attended providing an opportunity for a
group interview and discussion. In Hamburg, there was also the opportunity to visit a government-established library department at the public library that provides services to school libraries and conduct semi-structured interviews with these librarians as well. Throughout the time in Germany both Hoffman and Rittel traveled with the researcher, which provided for many informal discussions about their experiences and implementation efforts.

During the school visits the researcher completed the same observational questionnaire that the German teacher librarians had completed during their school visits in America. The researcher also conducted informal semi-structured interviews with the German teacher librarians to ask about the observed practices, if they had benefited from the ideas brought back from the United States, and what successes or challenges they had experienced with implementation. These interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The notes from informal conversations with Hoffman and Rittel were also utilized by the researcher, which led to richer descriptions of their experiences in implementing the best practices.

The researcher again utilized inductive qualitative content analysis, which allowed the researcher to work within an “interpretive paradigm” and to identify important themes within the content (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Transcripts from the virtual interviews, the list of practice implementation descriptions, the observation questionnaires from the German school visits, and the transcripts from the follow up face-to-face interviews were all analyzed following the same procedure as in phase one of this research. The purpose of this content analysis was to determine which best practices had been implemented and successfully transferred to this international setting. Member checking was again implemented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) throughout the data collection and data analysis process due to the possible misinterpretations from translation.

It was found that some of the ideas and practices observed in the U.S. were successfully implemented such as an increased focus on the teaching role of the teacher librarian, utilizing instructional technologies for instruction, increased social media use, reading promotion strategies and programs, and the training and educating of teachers about topics including: collaborating with the teacher librarian to prepare lessons that work with the teacher’s curriculum subjects and how to integrate technology into their teaching. Surprisingly the themes that emerged from this data were related to the challenges experienced by German teacher librarians rather than implementation successes, including: a lack of role definition and recognition by teachers, lack of support from the people in their schools and their government, and technology issues.

It was noted that the technology provided to school libraries in Germany seemed adequate – most of them had interactive whiteboards, several computers in the library, automated circulation system, internet access, and access to online databases. Yet the role of the teacher librarian in utilizing and integrating these technologies was vague. Many of the teacher librarians interviewed talked about trying to institute “media literacy programs to teach students how to be safe online,” but a lack of time was a problem because teachers would not dedicate time for this. Many commented that teachers only see the library “as a book place” and not as a “teaching place.” Also several of the teacher librarians interviewed commented that most teacher librarians in Germany think this same way, in that they do not recognize that teaching is a part of the teacher librarian’s job. These indicators of challenges all point to a need for further training and education programs for teacher librarians in Germany.

**Phase Three**

In the spring of 2017 the researcher conducted virtual interviews with the two German teacher librarian participants from phase one of the research, in order to gain insights on their activities and progress over the past six years following their visit to the United States. Due to the previous
relationships between the researcher and the participants, informal interviews were conducted as a way to examine the effects of the exchanges of best practices six years later. Interview questions focused on learning about the two German teacher librarian participants’ professional experiences and changes in their practices and careers since the time of the original research.

Both participants, Helga and Julia, have continued to be active in promoting the importance of school libraries in Germany, yet “due to the fact that there are nearly no full time jobs in the school library system in Germany,” they have both had to shift their professional focus. When asked about professional changes Julia explained that she had continued her education with further studies in Media Education at the University of Duisburg-Essen. She also continued to be active in school library professional organizations by taking on additional responsibilities as the Chairwoman for the School Library Association of North-Rhine-Westphalia and Chairwoman of the Commission Board of Experts on Library & School/School Library of the German Library Association. In 2016 Julia moved to a new position as “Librarian/Media Specialist at "Fachstelle für Öffentliche Bibliotheken NRW." This position is with the Federal State Office for Public Libraries of North Rhine-Westphalia. Here she was responsible for “funding, consulting, advanced education, networking for public libraries.” Her emphasis was on the public library as educational institution, cooperation with schools, and media education. It is important to remember in Germany the libraries are controlled by the federal state and there are often a government-established library department at the public library that provides services to school libraries. Just this year Julia has accepted a new position as “Head of the Public Library of Euskirchen, a town near Bonn with a population of 60,000.” Here she supervises 12 employees, works with 23 schools, and coordinates over 250 events yearly. Julia made it clear in her comments that she has continued in her efforts to support school libraries.

Yet, Helga is no longer active in the school library field, but has moved to the public library “due to a lack of career options” as a teacher librarian. For the past four years, she has been “the head of department the central media processing at Frankfurt City Library,” where she is mainly responsible for “cataloging, acquisition, media processing.” Yet, she remains “highly dedicated to the school library idea [and is] still a passive member at a school library association.” She states, “If there were career options in Germany, [being a teacher librarian] would be my favorite professional dream job.” While, not necessarily focused on school libraries, Helga is still very active in professional library organizations and presents at conferences on topics related to her current work. In 2017, Helga took on the additional responsibility of digital services for Frankfurt’s public libraries.

When asked about continuing to apply what they learned in the United States both participants spoke about the value of the experience and how they have been able to apply what they learned in their work. Julia said that she frequently presents “about the situation of school libraries and different approaches to the issue” by referring to what she observed in the U. S. She has also presented at the Goethe Institute on the promotion of reading and information literacy in school libraries in Germany. Not only has she had the opportunity to integrate her experiences with U.S. school libraries and librarians into her presentations, but also in exchanges with peers. In the years since her trip to the U.S. school libraries, she has visited school libraries in Argentina, Uruguay, and South Korea. She has also conducted research on education with apps. Her focus has been on integrating digital devices, apps, utilizing “students’ existing devices and competencies in a didactically meaningful way,” and “incorporating mobile devices into lesson plans.” Helga stated that when she returned from the trip to visit U.S. school libraries she “was so full of ideas” that could not be realized in her current position and that was the stimulus that drove her to look for new advanced position options where she could enact many of these ideas.
Unfortunately, she states, there are limited career options in Germany to be a full-time school based teacher librarian.

**Conclusions**

In documenting the practices implemented in German school libraries as a result of this project, it was found that great efforts were made on the part of the two participants. Hoffman and Rittel conducted workshops throughout Germany to disseminate what they observed and learned on their visits to American school libraries. Additional dissemination efforts were made through professional organization work, presenting at conferences, developing training materials, online forum discussions, and professional conversations. They also developed trainings for administrators, teachers, and teacher librarians on the teaching role and how to collaborate with the teacher librarian to prepare lessons that work with the teacher’s curriculum subjects. Efforts were also made in this area through the development of materials to promote the value of the teaching role of the teacher librarian. The ideas and strategies learned by the two German teacher librarians from U.S. teacher librarians contributed to an increased focus on working with teacher teams to promote and teach literacy and on creating and offering information literacy lessons for students to connect to classroom research projects. Furthermore, trainings for teachers on working with the teacher librarian and how to integrate technology into instruction were instituted through the creation of training workshops. While great progress was made, findings from phase two of this research highlighted the challenges or the struggles that the German teacher librarians experienced when attempting implementation, including lack of role definition and recognition by teachers, lack of support from the people in their buildings and their government, and technology issues.

In this third phase of the research to explore the effects six years later, the overarching issue of a lack of teacher librarian positions in Germany remains. Even as the professional organizations of the field provide reports on how school libraries can contribute to an increase in reading test scores and research is conducted to demonstrate the importance of a teacher librarian within the school in supporting students in the attainment of media literacy, Germany still remains “a country without a well-developed system of school libraries” (Mertes, 2014, p. iv). The two participants have had to move into more administrative type positions within the public library sector. While government-established library departments at public libraries do provide services to school libraries, it is in more of an administrative supporting role rather than an instructional role within the school.

These findings echo research in other countries such as Australia (Godfree, 2012; O’Connell, 2012), Brazil (Green & Johnston, 2015), England (Gildersleeves, 2012; McNicol, 2003), Italy (Marquette, 2012), Croatia (Špiranec & Zorica, 2011), Lithuania (Woolls, 2012), New Zealand (Calvert, 2016; Celpahne 2014), and Nigeria (Baro & Eze, 2016), where teacher librarians experience some of the same challenges. Even in countries, such as the U.S. that has what would be considered a “well-developed system of school libraries,” there are schools without teacher librarians. These similarities indicate that as a profession, teacher librarians around the world are all struggling with similar challenges and signify a need for increased international partnerships for research and opportunities for exchanges like the one described in this research. Asselin (2011) calls for school library researchers to connect with colleagues throughout the world, to address our issues and struggles on a global scale. Research such as this study should be conducted in other countries, that is research that allows for “connections, learning, listening, observing, respecting,
letting go of assumptions, discussing, and finding mutually meaningful inquiries” (p. 21). Conducting this type of exchange program provides a chance for teacher librarians to experience school library programs in other countries within their working contexts, gain new perspectives, and to learn and share best practices with one another in order to build a global community of practice where teacher librarians can learn from, share expertise with, and support one another to develop greater knowledge and strengthen the practice of teacher librarianship throughout the world.

**References**


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