The Instructional Consultant Role of the Elementary-School Library Media Specialist and the Effects of Program Scheduling on Its Practice

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Advancements in information technology have redefined the role of the school library media specialist in the 1980s and 1990s from that of a collector of resources and facility manager to that of a teacher and an instructional design consultant.

In 1988, the American Association of School Librarians developed *Information Power: Guidelines for School Media Programs* to provide the vision and guidance for the school library media specialists to cope with the significant changes within education and the proliferation of information resources. Information Power calls on library media specialists to provide leadership and expertise in the integration of educational and information technology into the instructional programs. To accomplish this goal, the guidelines define the media specialist roles as information specialist, teacher, and instructional consultant.(1)

Important precursors of the concept of the instructional consultant role as described in *Information Power* were defined by Loertscher in 1982 in a taxonomy for library media programs and by Turner in 1985 in an instructional design model to organize the joint instructional efforts of the library media specialist and the teacher.(2) In 1988, Loertscher revised his taxonomy, proposing eleven levels of library media program integration with the instructional program of the school. Each higher level identifies a closer collegial relationship between the library media specialist and the teacher. Levels eight through eleven describe library media program activities characteristic of the instructional consultant role as defined by *Information Power*.(3)

Cleaver and Taylor point out that *Information Power* emphasizes the instructional consultant role of the library media specialist. They interpret the instructional consultant role as an opportunity and a challenge to school library media specialists. Cleaver and Taylor explain that *Information Power* assigns the curriculum development and instructional development functions to the instructional consultant role of the library media specialist.(4) The curriculum development function "is the process that identifies educational goals and sets realistic expectations for learners."(5) The instructional development "is the systematic process that guides the planning, implementation, and evaluation of instruction in the individual classroom."(6)

Problem

Purposes of the Study

National guidelines and professional literature promote an active and high-level role for library media specialists; however, the perceptions and practices of professionals in the field remain unknown. The purpose of this study was to compare the theoretical instructional role of design and consultation with the instructional role perceived and practiced by school library media specialists in selected elementary schools.

Literature Review

Seven years before the publication of *Information Power*, Staples surveyed school media specialists on sixty competency statements and found that practitioners placed greater value on organization, management, acquisition, and dissemination than on consultation, instruction, utilization, and learning resources development. The respondents rated themselves as having a lower level of expertise on instructional development competencies.(7)

McIntosh reviewed library media and education literature and found a solid foundation for the three roles of the school library media specialist as stated in *Information Power*—information specialist, teacher, and instructional consultant. In addition, McIntosh studied the present role of the K–12 public-school library media specialist in two Kentucky counties. Using self-sampling descriptive research, McIntosh found that all three roles were being practiced at all three school levels, which included the elementary level. The role of information specialist was the most prominent, followed by teacher and instructional consultant.(8)

Two studies worth noting found that library media specialists did not perceive the importance of the instructional consultant role. Investigating a random sampling of 30 percent of all schools in Arizona, Schon, Helmstadter, and Robinson asked library media specialists and principals to rank the importance of competencies or skills in six major professional areas. The researchers found high agreement between principals and library media specialists; the competencies or skills related to the instructional role, however, were ranked low in importance by both principals and library media specialists.(9)

Johnson studied library media specialists in southern Illinois rural public schools and found that the library media specialists did not perceive the instructional consultant role as highly important and that they were not practicing the tasks representative of the instructional design and consultant role. Their questionnaire responses indicated they were performing in the lower eight levels of Loertscher's taxonomy" as supply and support personnel.(10)

Pickard studied how important the library media specialists in DeKalb County Public Schools in Georgia perceived the instructional role of design and consultation to be and to what extent they were practicing the instructional role of design and consultation. Pickard found that although the school library media specialists perceived their instructional role to be important, they seemed to view this role as supportive. Pickard also found that fewer than half practiced the actual instructional design level of Loertscher's taxonomy to a great or very great extent.(11)

The instructional consultant role was considered important in a literature-based reading program and a resource-based learning setting. The Bishop and Blazek study of the roles of the school library media specialist in an elementary school in Florida found that the school library media specialist played important roles as information specialist, teacher, and instructional consultant in the initiation and implementation of a literature-based reading program.(12)

Yetter investigated resource-based learning in five elementary-school libraries and two junior-high-school libraries and identified important personal characteristics of the school library media specialist in a resource-based-learning setting and showed the significance of the recent emphasis on the instructional role of school library media specialists as portrayed in *Information Power*.(13)

Based on a national sample of library media specialists, Person concluded that the extent to which school library media specialists perform the instructional consultant role was less than the extent to which they would ideally have liked to perform the role.(14)

Some of the research has tried to define variables that affect the practice of the instructional role. In her study of public high schools in Alabama, Florida, and North Carolina, Ruffin found a statistically significant relationship between the importance attached to instructional development activities by the school library media specialist and the amount of time school library media specialists spent on these activities.(15)

Turner and Martin concluded that rigid scheduling can prevent school library media specialists from working with teachers.(16) In two studies, van Deusen found that flexible scheduling related positively to the occurrence of instructional consultation.(17) In one study she found that the library media specialist most likely to be involved in curriculum has a flexible schedule in which team planning occurs, and in 1994 van Deusen and Tallman found that more consultation occurred between teachers and library media specialists in schools with flexible scheduling.(18)

Research Questions

Since the literature and numerous research studies supported the importance of the instructional consultation role of the library media specialist, this research examined this role as perceived and practiced by a national sample of elementary-school media specialists.

In the examination of this role as perceived and practiced by school library media specialists, the following questions were posed:

- 1. Do library media specialists perceive the instructional design and consultant role to be important to their professional role?
- 2. Are library media specialists practicing the instructional design and consultant role?
- 3. Do library media specialists practice the instructional design and consultant role consistent with their professional beliefs?
- 4. Does the scheduling pattern of elementary library media specialists relate to the performance of the instructional consultant role?

This study expanded Pickard's DeKalb County Public Schools study, in which the first three questions listed above were addressed, through a national survey and added a fourth question on scheduling.(19)

Methodology

Subjects

Subjects for this study were randomly drawn from the population of elementary-school library media specialists who were members of the American Library Association. From a population of 1,916 individual members, 296 names were randomly selected by the American Library Association's Office of Publishing Services.

Instrument

A three-page questionnaire was used to gather data. The first part contained eighteen statements relating to the instructional role, similar to the statements in Pickard's questionnaire developed for a similar research study in DeKalb County Public Schools in Georgia.(20) Thirteen of the eighteen statements were identical, four statements were slightly revised, and one statement was replaced. Johnson used all of Pickard's eighteen statements in her dissertation, revising only one statement to clarify its meaning.(21) The works of both Pickard and Johnson help support the validity of the instrument as a measure for library media specialist opinion.

The eighteen statements were as follows:

- 1. Provide access to materials through organization and classification that integrate materials in all formats into a unified collection.
- 2. Provide reference services and materials to individual students and teachers.
- 3. Gather materials for a teacher with spur-of-the moment notice.
- 4. Plan informally and briefly with a teacher for library involvement in a unit.
- 5. Gather materials requested by a teacher in advance of a class project or assignment.
- 6. Promote the instructional philosophy of the library media center program.
- 7. Plan formally with teachers to supply materials or activities in response to a teacherplanned unit.
- 8. Help teachers plan, implement, and evaluate instructional units where library media center materials are supplementary or used for enrichment.
- 9. Help the teacher plan, implement, and evaluate instructional units where the entire content is based on resources and activities of the library media center program.
- 10. Participate with the teacher in assessing students' achievements in a resource-based unit and feel responsible for student achievement.
- 11. Participate as a member of the school or district curriculum committee.
- 12. Analyze and interpret content of instructional materials in relation to the curriculum.
- 13. Design and conduct in-service education programs for teachers, aides, and other school-related groups.
- 14. Provide the leadership and expertise for incorporating appropriate technologies into the school's instructional program.

- 15. Explain various styles of learning that account for individual differences among students.
- 16. Use information, communication, and learning theories and models in relation to learning styles and individual differences among students.
- 17. Identify appropriate usage of various communication media in the learning environment.
- 18. Assist and guide teachers and students in the design, development, and evaluation of instructional programs in relation to learner needs, teacher strategies, and learning environments.

Seventeen of the eighteen statements were based on Loertscher's taxonomy for library media programs and Staple's competencies for consultation, utilization, instruction, and learning resources development.(22) Statement 14 was derived from the discussion of the instructional consultant role of the library media specialist in Information Power.(23)

The first eight statements addressed the levels of Loertscher's taxonomy, beginning at level two (Self-Help Warehouse) and continuing in order through level nine (Instructional Design, Level I).(24) Statements nine through eighteen related to levels ten (Instructional Design, Level II) and eleven (Curriculum Development) of Loertscher.

Parts 1 and 2 of Pickard's questionnaire were combined into one section providing each statement with a dual five-point Likert scale: one for rating importance to the professional role and the other to actual work practice.(25) The respondents indicated level of agreement. The second part included four questions about demographics: the library media specialist's years of experience, present position, program scheduling, and familiarity with *Information Power*.

Procedure

The two-part questionnaire and cover letter were sent to each of the American Library Association members who were selected for the sample.

Of the library media specialists who were sent the questionnaire, 140 library media specialists responded to the first mailing and an additional 94 responded to the second mailing. The 234 returned questionnaires represented a 79 percent return from the sample. Of those returned, 197 were usable, and 37 responses could not be included in the results because they were from secondary library media specialists, a principal, a volunteer worker, or had not been completed.

As designed in the instrument, the following point values were assigned to each response:

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strongly agree= 5

agree = 4

neither = 3

disagree = 2

strongly disagree = 1
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A mean was calculated for each of the statement's responses to determine how important the statement was to the professional role of respondents and the actual work practice of respondents.

Results and Conclusions

Important to Professional Role

Table 1 lists the means of statement responses to professional role importance in descending order along with its standard deviation. As expected, reference services showed the highest mean with statement 5, "Gather materials requested by a teacher in advance of a class project or assignment," and statement 1, "Provide access to materials," close behind. Appearing near the top, statements 7, 8, and 11 were the first of the instructional role statements on this list and represented three of the last four levels of Loertscher's taxonomy. Statement 14, "Provide the leadership and expertise for incorporating appropriate technologies into the school's instructional program," scored seventh, illustrating its importance to library media specialists. This statement was developed for this study based on the discussion of the instructional consultant role of the library media specialist in *Information Power*.

Table 1. Responses to Important to Professional Role in Descending Order

	Professional Role		
Abbreviated Statements	Mean	SD	
2. Reference services	4.929	.277	
5. Gather materials in advance	4.838	.445	
1. Provide access	4.785	.493	
6. Promote philosophy	4.741	.545	
7. Plan formally a teacher-planned unit		.538	
4. Plan informally		.676	
14. Provide leadership for technology	4.590	.678	
8. Help teachers teach as supplemental	4.558	.641	
11. School or district curriculum committee member	4.556	.792	
17. Identify usage of communication media		.715	
9. Help teachers teach in resource-based unit	4.393	.844	
13. Conduct in-services	4.360	.885	
12. Analyze materials to curriculum	4.344	.914	

18. Assist in design of instructional program	4.133	.938
16. Use information, communication, and learning theories	3.974	1.010
10. Equal partner in resource-based unit	3.954	.978
3. Gather materials with spur-of-the-moment notice	3.867	1.024
15. Explain learning styles	3.295	1.173

With the exception of statements 3, 10, 15, and 16, the means for all the statements referring to perceived importance to professional role fall into the range of 4, indicating a strong agreement with the statements. School library media specialists did not believe their role includes the duty to "gather materials for a teacher with spur-of-the-moment notice" (statement 3). Neither did they agree that it is important to "participate with the teacher in assessing students' achievements in a resource-based unit and feel responsible for student achievement" (statement 10). "Explain various styles of learning that account for individual differences among students" (statement 15) had the lowest mean score.

The scoring of the means for importance to the profession indicated that school library media specialists were supporting the guidelines of *Information Power*, which includes the practice of the instructional design and the consultant role for school library media specialists.

Actual Work Practice

Table 2 lists the means of statement responses to actual work practice in descending order along with the standard deviations. Statement 14, "Provide the leadership and expertise for incorporating appropriate technologies into the school's instructional program," had the highest mean among the instructional consultant role statements, suggesting that school library media specialists do practice leadership in technology. On the other hand, eleven of the twelve instructional consultant role statements showed means lower than the statements dealing with the traditional roles of warehousing and making materials accessible. Although library media specialists agreed with the importance of the instructional consultant role to their profession, they lagged in practicing the role.

Table 2. Responses to Actual Work Practice in Descending Order

	Actual Work	Actual Work Practice			
Abbreviated Statements	Mean	SD			
2. Reference services	4.684	.566			
5. Gather materials in advance	4.561	.717			

1. Provide access	4.435	.811
3. Gather materials with spur-of-the-moment notice	4.214	.925
6. Promote philosophy	4.198	.917
14. Provide leadership for technology	3.974	1.122
4. Plan informally	3.918	1.083
17. Identify usage of communication media	3.874	1.028
11. School or district curriculum committee member	3.730	1.229
12. Analyze materials to curriculum	3.724	1.149
7. Plan formally a teacher-planned unit	3.679	1.200
13. Conduct inservices	3.553	1.275
8. Help teachers teach as supplemental	3.447	1.181
16. Use information, communication, and learning theories	3.415	1.192
9. Help teachers teach in resource-based unit	3.289	1.311
18. Assist in design of instructional program	3.196	1.157
10. Equal partner in resource-based unit	2.854	1.202
15. Explain learning styles	2.839	1.181

Differences in Beliefs of Profession Role and Actual Work Practice

For each statement, table 3 lists the mean, the standard deviation, the difference between the means of perception of importance to professional role and actual work practice, and P-value to test the significance of the difference.

Table 3. Difference in Important to Professional Role and Actual Work Practice

Professional Role Belief	Actual Work Practice					
Abbreviated Statements	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	P- Value
1. Provide access	4.785	.493	4.435	.811	.351	<.0001
2. Reference services	4.929	.277	4.684	.566	.245	<.0001

3. Gather materials with spur-of-the-moment notice	3.867	1.024	4.214	.925	347	<.0001
4. Plan informally	4.605	.676	3.918	1.083	.682	<.0001
5. Gather materials in advance	4.838	.445	4.561	.717	.276	<.0001
6. Promote philosophy	4.741	.545	4.198	.917	.542	<.0001
7. Plan formally a teacher-planned unit	4.731	.538	3.679	1.200	1.051	<.0001
8. Help teachers teach as supplemental	4.558	.641	3.477	1.181	1.092	<.0001
9. Help teachers teach in resource-based unit	4.393	.884	3.289	1.311	1.108	<.0001
10. Equal partner in resource-based unit	3.954	.978	2.854	1.202	1.094	<.0001
11. School or district curriculum committee member	4.556	.792	3.730	1.229	.827	<.0001
12. Analyze materials to curriculum	4.344	.914	3.724	1.149	.635	<.0001
13. Conduct in-services	4.360	.885	3.553	1.275	.807	<.0001
14. Provide leadership for technology	4.590	.678	3.974	1.122	.613	<.0001
15. Explain learning styles	3.295	1.173	2.839	1.181	.456	<.0001
16. Use information, communication, and learning theories	3.974	1.010	3.415	1.192	.565	<.0001
17. Identify usage of communication media	4.466	.715	3.874	1.028	.602	<.0001
18. Assist in design of instructional program	4.133	.938	3.196	1.157	.938	<.0001

Table 3 indicates that, with only one exception, all statements rating actual work practice had means lower than the means for perceived importance to professional role, and the mean differences were significant checking at the .05 level. Library media specialists did not practice the instructional design and consultation role to the same extent to which they believed they should. Response to statement 3, which has a negative mean difference, indicates that even though library media specialists don't consider "Gather materials for a teacher with spur-of-the moment notice" important to their professional role, they still fulfill these requests.

Scheduling Patterns

Table 4 compares the actual-work-practice statement responses of elementary-school library media specialists who used fixed scheduling to those who used flexible scheduling. For each statement, table 4 lists the mean, the standard deviation, the mean difference, and P-value to test the significance of the difference. In analyzing data, library media specialists who had a mixed pattern of scheduling, fixed and flexible, were considered as having a flexible schedule.

Table 4. Comparison of Work Practice of Library Media Specialists Who Use Fixed Scheduling to Library Media Specialists Who Use Flexible Scheduling

Fixed		Flex	xible			
Abbreviated Statements	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	P- Value
1. Provide access	4.369	.816	4.511	.802	.142	<.2272
2. Reference services	4.579	.630	4.809	.449	.230	<.0044
3. Gather materials with spur-of-the-moment notice	4.185	.949	4.250	.900	.065	<.6270
4. Plan informally	3.682	1.178	4.202	.881	.520	<.0007
5. Gather materials in advance	4.454	.790	4.693	.594	.239	<.0197
6. Promote philosophy	4.075	1.011	4.349	.763	.273	<.0396
7. Plan formally a teacher-planned unit	3.299	1.261	4.135	.944	.836	<.0001
8. Help teachers teach as supplemental	3.151	1.233	3.865	.991	.714	<.0001
9. Help teachers teach in resource-based unit	2.933	1.368	3.708	1.110	.775	<.0001
10. Equal partner in resource-based unit	2.619	1.228	3.138	1.112	.519	<.0027
11. School or district curriculum committee member	3.602	1.253	3.886	1.188	.285	<.1072
12. Analyze materials to curriculum	3.529	1.182	3.955	1.071	.426	<.0102
13. Conduct in-services	3.278	1.324	3.888	1.133	.610	<.0007
14. Provide leadership for technology	3.781	1.160	4.202	1.036	.421	<.4775
15. Explain learning styles	2.785	1.259	2.907	1.081	.122	<.4775
16. Use information, communication, and learning theories	3.321	1.277	3.529	1.077	.208	<.2287
17. Identify usage of communication	3.790	1.115	3.977	.907	.186	<.2139

media						
18. Assist in design of instructional program	2.915	1.172	3.534	1.050	.619	<.0002

Library media specialists with flexible schedule programs scored higher means on all statements than library media specialists with fixed schedule programs. Flexible schedule programs can provide a better vehicle to achieving a well-developed library media program. In eight out of twelve statements that measure instructional role practice, the means for flexible-schedule library media specialists were significantly higher at the .05 level. The differences of means for statements 11, 15, 16, and 17 were not significant. The difference of practice for statement 15 ("Explain various styles of learning that account for individual differences among students") was not significant, but, as noted above, respondents did not agree to its importance to the professional role or to its practice. School library media specialists who used a flexible pattern of scheduling reported practicing the instructional role more than the library media specialists who use the fixed pattern.

Discussion

The findings of this study both support and disagree with past studies. This study agrees with Person's conclusion that the extent to which school library media specialists perform the instructional consultant role is less than the extent to which they believe they should.(26) Contrary to the study of Johnson, however, this study shows that library media specialists do perceive the importance of the instructional consultant role.(27) *Information Power* has raised their consciousness of the importance of the instructional consultant role. Their practice of the instructional consultant role is lagging, but with time library media specialists can achieve their goals. Their commitment to the instructional consultant role will be strengthened with the full implementation of automation because they will be freed of time-consuming clerical duties. But along with the library media specialists' commitment, teachers must learn to share their responsibilities with them.

This study supports Pickard's conclusion that although library media specialists perceive their instructional role to be important they seem to view this role as supportive. (28) For example, library media specialists did not think that it was important for them to "participate with the teacher in assessing students' achievements in a resource-based unit and feel responsible for student achievement." Also supporting this conclusion was the drop in means for "Explain various styles of learning that account for individual differences among students" and "Use information, communication, and learning theories and models in relation to learning styles and individual differences among students."

Van Deusen found that flexible scheduling was positively related to the occurrence of instructional consultation, and this study confirms her finding.(29) With flexible scheduling, a library media specialist usually has more time to perform instructional consulting activities. In

addition, the library media specialist has an opportunity to be closer to the flow of a teacher's instruction because class or other group research lessons involve the library media specialist. Only 45 percent of the respondents listed "flexible" as their pattern of scheduling. For *Information Power* guidelines to be more widely implemented in the schools, more library media specialists must work within a flexible schedule program.

In summary, this study suggests that school library media specialists must keep informed of curriculum changes and teaching models. By focusing on the teaching role, they can achieve *Information Power*'s role of instructional consultant. To be a generalist is never easy, but school library media specialists have taken on the challenge.

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