

The Instructional Role of the Library Media Specialist as Perceived by Elementary School Principals

[Audrey P. Church](#) is Assistant Professor, Department of Education and Special Education, Longwood University, Farmville, Virginia.

This study explores Virginia elementary school principals' perceptions of the instructional role of the library media specialist and the origin of these perceptions. Principals who responded to the study strongly endorse the role of library media specialist as teacher of information literacy skills and as instructional partner. Respondents indicated that they learn about the instructional role of the library media specialist from library media specialists with whom they work, either in their current positions as principals or through their previous experiences as classroom teachers. Principals form their views on the basis of both negative and positive interactions with library media specialists and base their expectations of their current and future library media specialists on these prior experiences and expectations. Another key finding was that principals place primary responsibility for initiation of collaboration at both the individual teacher level and the school level with the library media specialist. These findings indicate that school library media specialist preparation programs should prepare their graduates to positively present and advocate for their key instructional role and that training in this area should be provided for those library media specialists already in the field.

Introduction

In years past the school librarian was expected to build well-rounded library collections and to be an effective circulator and manager of library resources. An analysis of research and standards in the field across the past fifty years shows that the instructional role of the librarian has steadily evolved from passive to static to active (AASL 1998; Craver 1986). Today's library media specialist is called upon to take an active role in the instructional program of the school, serving not only as program administrator and information specialist but also as teacher and instructional partner (AASL1998). National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation standards for programs preparing school library media specialists emphasize both teaching and learning and collaboration and leadership (ALA 2003). National Board Professional Teaching Standards for library media also stress the collaborative teaching role of the library media specialist (NBPTS 2001). The library media specialist of the twenty-first century should actively participate in the curriculum and instructional program of the school in the areas of curriculum development, collaborative teaching, and information literacy instruction.

Principals serve as the instructional leaders of their schools. They establish school climate, determine performance expectations, and set priorities for effective teaching and student learning (Campbell 1991). Principal advocacy is key to the development of a strong school library media program that supports and enhances teaching and learning (Haycock 1989; Henri, Hay, and

Oberg 2002). Principals foster effective library programs through budgetary decisions that affect collections and staffing, through organizational decisions that affect scheduling, and through the expectations that they set for library use by students and teachers (Hartzell 2002b).

Statement of the Problem

In a study completed by Wilson and Blake (1993), 68 percent of principals who responded indicated that they did not have a good understanding of the role of the library media center in today's schools. Although standards and best practice demonstrate that library media specialists should play an active role in curriculum and instruction in the school, principals are typically not aware of the instructional potential of the library media specialist. They tend to hold the more traditional view of the library media specialist as one who selects, purchases, organizes, and circulates materials (Buchanan 1982; Dorrell and Lawson 1995; Kolencik 2001).

Today's school library media specialist should function as a collaborative instructional partner by planning, teaching, and evaluating with fellow educators. The library media specialist should also function as a teacher of information literacy skills, teaching students to access, evaluate, and use information in the context of their content area curriculum (AASL 1998). When library media specialists fulfill these roles, taking an active part in instruction in their schools, student achievement increases (Lance 2005).

Publications in the educational leadership field rarely address school libraries (Hartzell 2002a), and few principal preparation programs include the topic in their coursework (Hartzell 2002a; Veltze 1992; Wilson and McNeil 1998). Also, while most principals are former teachers, few have worked as library media specialists (Buchanan 1982; Naylor and Jenkins 1988). School libraries are not mentioned in the seven standards or in the twenty-seven elements that make up the *Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership for Principals, Superintendents, Curriculum Directors, and Supervisors* (NPBEA 2002). Lack of principal knowledge regarding the role of the library media specialist in teaching and learning prevents the library program from developing to its full potential and prevents the library media specialist from actively contributing to student learning to the greatest possible extent.

Most studies done in the field examine principals' views across grades K-12. If a grade level has been singled out, it has traditionally been at the secondary level, as evidenced by studies completed by Burnell (1978), Campbell and Cordiero (1996), and Kolencik (2001). Most studies completed have examined principals' overall perceptions of library media specialists, although one focused on their leadership role (Gustafson 1982). The purpose of this study is to focus on elementary school principals' perceptions of the instructional role of the library media specialist to determine how elementary school principals view the library media specialist as a teacher, how elementary school principals view the library media specialist as an instructional partner, and the source of these perceptions.

Review of the Literature

Instructional Role of the Library Media Specialist

Standards in the Field of School Library Media

Tracing the evolution of the instructional role of the library media specialist, *Standards for School Library Programs* (AASL 1960) suggest that instruction in library skills and in the use of materials be a cooperative venture involving the principal, the department chair, the classroom teacher, and the librarian. *Standards for School Media Programs* (AASL 1969) note that library media specialists should provide instructional resources to teachers, work with teachers on curriculum planning, and serve on teaching teams. *Media Programs: District and School* (AASL 1975) require that the media specialist show competency in curriculum development and in teaching and learning strategies, while *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (AASL 1988) specifies that library media specialists function both as teachers and as instructional consultants. *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (AASL 1998) requires that library media specialists function as teachers and instructional partners to collaboratively teach information literacy skills in the context of content area curriculum. Throughout the standards issued over the past fifty years, a common and developing strand is that of the active instructional role of the library media specialist.

Similarly, candidates enrolled in initial programs for school library media specialist preparation that are nationally recognized by NCATE and the AASL must demonstrate their ability to provide students with a stimulating learning environment, to integrate information literacy skills instruction into the content curriculum, to function as instructional partners and educational leaders, as well as their knowledge of learners and learning and skills as effective and knowledgeable teachers (ALA 2003). Practicing library media specialists pursuing National Board Certification must demonstrate teaching competencies such as knowledge of learners, learning styles, human growth and development, and knowledge of the principles of teaching and learning, and must be able to integrate information literacy into the content curriculum through collaboration with classroom teachers (NBPTS 2001). Both newly trained library media specialists and experienced library media specialists striving for professional excellence are expected to practice a strong instructional role.

Recognizing the teaching role of the school library media specialist, Virginia requires that a library media specialist be licensed as a teacher (Virginia Department of Education 1998). Library media specialists in Virginia public schools earn licensure through one of two routes: They either hold endorsement in a content area and add Library Media PreK-12 to their teaching licenses through the completion of twenty-four credit hours of library media coursework and a supervised clinical experience, or, if they come to education from another career field, they complete fifteen credit hours in professional education studies plus their required library media coursework and an extended and supervised clinical experience in a library setting.

Standards for school library media programs emphasize the teaching role of the library media specialist. Standards for the educational preparation of library media specialists require candidates to demonstrate competence in teaching and collaboration. Standards for library media specialists who desire to be nationally recognized for excellence in the profession focus on teaching. Virginia requires that library media specialists be licensed as teachers. The intent is that today's library media specialists are teachers and instructional partners.

Key Knowledge Claim: Based on standards in the field, today's library media specialists are required to function as teachers and as instructional partners.

Impact on Student Achievement

Numerous studies completed by Lance, Rodney, and Hamilton-Pennell (2000, 2001, 2002, 2005) and others have demonstrated that student achievement is higher when library media specialists take an active role in teaching and learning. Colorado Student Assessment Program fourth-grade reading test scores were 18 percent higher in schools where library media specialists planned cooperatively with teachers, provided in-service training to teachers, and taught information literacy skills to students (Lance, Rodney, and Hamilton-Pennell 2000).

Baughman (2000) found that Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System scores were higher at the elementary level when a library instruction program aligned with the state curriculum framework was in place. Smith (2001) investigated the effect that school library media programs had on student performance on the reading component of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills and, at the elementary school level, discovered a positive and statistically significant correlation between the school's reading test scores and the library media specialist meeting with the principal and other school administrators, serving on the school's curriculum committee, planning instructional units with classroom teachers, team teaching with classroom teachers, and providing training to teachers.

Rodney, Lance, and Hamilton-Pennell (2003), exploring the impact of school libraries on students' academic achievement in Michigan, examined reading test scores in the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. They found that fourth graders' test scores were likely to increase when students spent more time in the library and when the library media specialist spent more time developing collections, planning and working collaboratively with teachers, and teaching information literacy skills to students.

Todd and Kuhlthau (2004) conducted a study in Ohio, examining ways in which library media specialists and library media programs helped students learn. Surveying over 13,000 students served by thirty-nine effective school libraries, they concluded that school library media specialists in Ohio are agents of resources, information literacy development, knowledge construction, academic achievement, independent reading and personal development, technological literacy, and individualized learning. The assistance provided by library media specialists is strongest in the elementary school where students need more instruction to develop into information-literate, independent learners.

Key Knowledge Claim: When library media specialists take an active role in instruction, student achievement, as measured by standardized test scores, increases. Students benefit when library media specialists function as teachers and co-teachers, and libraries should be an integral part of the instructional program of the school.

Principals

Standards in the Field of Educational Leadership

After conducting a survey of NCATE accredited principal preparation programs and finding that over 75 percent of them do not include information about school library media programs in their coursework, Wilson and McNeil (1998) urged library media specialists to take action, to contact NCATE and other accrediting bodies, and to lobby for the inclusion of school library information in educational leadership programs. Examination of the current national standards for principal preparation, *Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership for*

Principals, Superintendents, Curriculum Directors, and Supervisors (NPBEA 2002), shows that this had not occurred.

While the standards for the field of educational leadership are silent on school library media programs, it should be noted that the federal government sends mixed messages regarding school library media. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act includes the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program, which promotes literacy and reading through funding to school libraries (ALA 2006a). It also includes school library media specialists in its definition of instructional staff (ALA 2006b). The NCLB Act, however, does not require that school libraries be staffed by highly qualified library media specialists; in fact, it does not even address the qualifications for school library media specialists (ALA 2006a).

Similarly, it is only with the July 2006 release of the *Current Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: School Year 2003–04* that the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) changed its classification of library media specialists to include them under the category of instruction-related expenditures (U.S. Department of Education 2006). Prior to this recent change, NCES utilized its 1950s classification of library media specialists as support staff—instruction (ALA 2006b), relegating them to support staff and failing to recognize their active instructional role.

The federal definitions and classifications have been slow to evolve with the profession, and the contribution of school library media specialists to student learning is not fully acknowledged at the federal level. Despite the fact that national standards for educational leadership do not address the importance of school library media programs in instruction and that federal expectations are inconsistent, library media specialists play an important role in student learning, and principals are the key.

Key Knowledge Claim: Neither standards in the educational leadership field nor positions of the federal government acknowledge the key instructional role of library media specialists in student learning.

Role of the Principal in Supporting Library Media Programs

The principal, as the instructional leader of the school, must provide support for the library media program. Buchanan (1982) asserted that the principal must see the library media program as an integral part of the instructional program of the school, must insure that the library media specialist is truly a member of the school's instructional team, and must encourage teachers to view the library media program and library media specialist in this light. Pearson (1989) noted that the library and its instructional programs should be an integral part of the school instructional environment and that a good working relationship between the principal and the library media specialist made this possible. Similarly, Campbell (1991) proposed that the relationship of the principal to the school library media program was critical to its success, that the principal must understand clearly the role and purpose of the school library media program in the context of the entire school, must set high expectations for the program, must support the program through personal commitment and sufficient funding, and must communicate to teachers and students the importance of the program.

Henri and Hay (1995) noted that support of the principal was a crucial factor in the ability of the library media specialist to influence instruction. Oberg (1996) found that principals supported the

school library media program by promoting the program to teachers and making clear to teachers that it was to be an integral part of instruction by showing personal commitment to it, affirming its value, and modeling library use. They supported the library program administratively with adequate budget, adequate clerical staff, and flexible scheduling, which allowed library media specialists to collaboratively plan with teachers. Finally, they supported the program by placing the library media specialist in leadership roles within the school.

Kolencik (2001) noted that the principal's leadership in promoting and supporting the library media program contributed to a positive collaborative school culture that led to school improvement and to increased student learning.

Speaking at the 2002 White House Conference on School Libraries, Hartzell (2002a) encouraged principals to reconceptualize and think of the library program as an investment rather than a cost. From his work with the DeWitt Wallace Foundation's Library Power program, he reported that effective school libraries have both dynamic library media specialists and committed principals. Principals develop school schedules and foster a school climate that either inhibits or facilitates collaboration.

Hartzell (2002b) noted that a barrier to full implementation of the library media program was lack of faculty awareness concerning the library media program's offerings. It was the principal's duty to promote with teachers the library's instructional potential. Principals also influenced the extent to which information literacy instruction was integrated into the curriculum of the school, and they controlled the library media specialist's ability to serve in leadership positions in the school.

Lance, Rodney, and Russell (2007) examined the impact of library media specialists, principals, and teachers' perceptions of the library program on student achievement. They reported that Indiana students across grade levels earned higher standardized test scores in schools where principals valued collaboration between classroom teachers and library media specialists and where principals supported flexible scheduling for the library.

Van Hamersveld (2007) surveyed school administrators in Texas regarding their perceptions of the potential of the school library media program to positively affect student achievement. She suggested that further research into administrators' perceptions of the instructional role of the library media specialist is needed if library media programs are to be fully integrated into the instructional program of the school.

Principals set the tone and establish the learning environment within their schools. For full implementation of the library media program to occur, principals must establish a culture of collaboration and set the expectation with teachers that the library will make an active contribution to instruction. For this to occur, principals must have a clear understanding of the instructional potential of the library media program.

Key Knowledge Claim: Principal support of the instructional role of the library media specialist is critical for successful implementation to occur.

Principals' Perceptions of the Role of the Library Media Specialist

Findings from studies that examine principals' perceptions of library media specialists demonstrate that principals do not have a clear understanding of the role of today's library media specialist in schools. Naylor and Jenkins (1988), studying North Carolina principals' perceptions of the terminology used in a new statewide performance evaluation instrument for library media specialists, found that principals were not aware of the range of services provided by library media specialists. Those principals who described the climate in the library media center as low viewed library media specialists as managers of materials, inventory, and budgets, while those who described the climate as high tended to view the library media specialist in more of an instructional role.

Surveying elementary school principals and library media specialists in North Carolina regarding the principals' relationships to the library media program, Campbell (1991) concluded that the effectiveness of the school library media program is dependent on a partnership between the principal and the library media specialist. He found a significant difference in how principals rated their relationships to the library media program and how their library media specialists rated them: principals rated themselves higher than did their library media specialists, suggesting a need for better communication between the two.

Dorrell and Lawson (1995) found that Missouri high school principals held a traditional view of the library media specialist as one who performed clerical duties and selected, purchased, cataloged, and circulated materials. Tasks such as curriculum planning and conferences with teachers, tasks that demonstrate the instructional role of the library media specialist, received only average ratings of importance from principals.

Kolencik (2001), studying principal support of the school library media program and information literacy instruction in secondary schools in western Pennsylvania, found that principals considered the major role of the library media specialist to be that of reference and research service, while school library media specialists defined their primary role as that of information literacy instruction. Principals in the study cited lack of funding as the primary impediment to integrating information literacy instruction into the curriculum, while library media specialists cited lack of understanding of the role of the library media specialist as an instructional partner as a major barrier.

In 2002, *School Library Journal* surveyed 242 principals across the United States to determine their level of knowledge and understanding about the school library media program. Eighty percent of the respondents strongly believed that the library contributed to the overall value of the school. However, only 47 percent acknowledged a direct connection between the school library media program and student achievement, and only 41 percent noted that the library program had a direct effect on student scores on standardized tests (Lau 2002).

Alexander, Smith, and Carey (2003) surveyed 180 K-12 principals in Kentucky to determine the importance that they placed on school library media programs. In rating the importance of the library media specialists' roles in the five areas (information literacy, collaboration/leadership/technology, learning/teaching, information access/delivery, and program administration), learning/teaching was rated the lowest across all grade levels. Across all roles, middle and high school principals rated the library media specialists significantly higher than did elementary school principals. The authors hypothesize that this low rating may be a result of

elementary school principals' continued view of the library program as support for but not integral to teaching and learning.

Marcoux (2005) reported on a survey of 372 K-12 Washington state principals to identify their perceptions of the responsibilities of various roles practiced by their library media specialists. Respondents indicated that they viewed library media specialists as reading advocates, information specialists, information managers, and instructional partners. In examining responsibilities within these roles, however, principals rated reading advocacy, integration of instructional technology, management of the library collection, and teaching higher than they did the responsibilities of curriculum integration, curriculum development, evaluation, and assessment of student achievement. Marcoux concluded that principals do not have a clear understanding of the instructional role of the library media specialist and how it contributes to student achievement.

Kaplan (2006) reported similar findings, characterizing principals' knowledge of and attitude toward school library media specialists as one of benign neglect. She concluded that principals are not aware of the instructional role of the library media specialist and that they do not set high enough expectations for the contributions that the library media specialist can make to the instructional program of the school.

Key Knowledge Claim: Principals in the studies reviewed tended to view the library media specialist as a resource person, a provider of reference services, and an administrator of library duties and clerical tasks. They tended to view the library media specialist in a traditional light and are not fully aware of the instructional role the library media specialist should play.

Sources of Principals' Perceptions

Studies examined show that principals have varying levels of understanding and expectations for the instructional role of the library media specialist. Buchanan (1982) noted that principals were former teachers but typically had no prior experience as library media specialists. They did not receive instruction regarding school libraries in their principal preparation programs. Hartzell (2002a) noted that, while principals are classroom teachers before they become administrators, few teacher training programs provide information to future teachers concerning library media specialists as partners in curriculum and instruction. Pearson (1989) noted that principal preparation coursework did not include information in the importance of the role of the library in the school's instructional program. He suggested that it was the responsibility of the library media specialist to inform and educate the principal concerning the library's potential contribution to student learning. Over 75 percent of NCATE-accredited graduate principal-preparation programs surveyed by Wilson and McNeil (1998) reported that they did not include information about school libraries in their coursework. Professors in educational administration programs identified the need for more school library information in their textbooks and journals (Veltze 1992).

Several researchers have attempted to ascertain the source of principals' perceptions regarding libraries. Naylor and Jenkins (1988) reported that principals learn about library media specialists from personal observation; from faculty, student, and parental comments; and from conversations with the library media specialist. Campbell (1991) found that principals gain most of their knowledge about school library media programs from their current library media specialists. The largest percentage of principals (28 percent) indicated that their primary source

of knowledge regarding the role of the library media specialist was the current library media specialist in their school. Only 8 percent of the principals responding listed college coursework as the source of their knowledge of library media specialists.

Buchanan (1982) and Hartzell (2002a) suggested that principals' perceptions of the role of the library media specialist are also formed through library experiences as students and library experiences as classroom teachers. Alexander, Smith, and Carey (2003) proposed that administrators' perceptions of the role of the library media specialist are based on day-to-day, on-the-job experiences that they have had, perhaps even experiences that they had as students.

Wilson and Blake (1993) surveyed one thousand principals and one thousand library media specialists to determine principals' knowledge of library media programs. Ninety percent of the 572 library media specialists who responded felt that principals were not knowledgeable about library media programs. Of the 423 principals who responded, 68 percent agreed. Ninety percent of the library media specialists felt that information about library media programs should be included in principal preparation coursework; 78 percent of the principals agreed.

Findings from this review of the literature indicate that principals receive little or no information concerning the role of the school library media program in their principal preparation coursework. Perceptions and understandings that they have of the role of the library media program and the library media specialist in the school develop from their interactions and experiences. It is important to identify the source of principals' knowledge regarding library media programs so that a plan of action for better communication might be developed.

Key Knowledge Claim: Principals' primary source of information regarding library media specialists' roles is personal experience with library media specialists with whom they work.

Research Questions

Focusing at the elementary grade level and examining the instructional role of the library media specialist, the following research questions guided the study:

1. How do elementary school principals view the library media specialist as a teacher of information literacy skills?
2. How do elementary school principals view the library media specialist as an instructional partner?
3. What is the basis for elementary school principals' views of the instructional role of the library media specialist?

Method

Virginia Standards of Quality mandate that a part-time licensed library media specialist be employed in schools with enrollment of 1–299 students and that a full-time library media specialist be employed in schools with enrollment of 300 or more students (Virginia Department of Education 2007). According to the Virginia Department of Education (2006a), there were 1,177 elementary schools in Virginia for the 2006–07 school year. Schools containing only grades PK and K, only grade six, and only grades six and seven, although labeled “elementary” by the Virginia Department of Education, were excluded from the study as were any schools for which the Locale Code was not available in the NCES *Common Core of Data*. A total of 1,158

schools remained in the sampling frame. Principals of these 1,158 elementary schools were the target population.

Principals' e-mail addresses were obtained from school webpages linked through the Virginia Department of Education's School Divisions listing (Virginia Department of Education 2006b). In instances in which the principal's e-mail address was not available on the school webpage, an e-mail was sent to the school division's central office requesting that address. The sampling frame consisted of Virginia elementary school principals whose e-mail addresses were known ($n = 927$).

A proportional stratified random sampling method was used to select elementary schools for the study. The first level of stratification was by the eight Superintendents' Regional Study Groups in Virginia, and then, within each region, the second level of stratification was by urban and nonurban setting, based on the NCES assigned Locale Code (U.S. Department of Education 2005). A survey was developed, adapted from those used by Alexander, Smith, and Carey (2003), Kolencik (2001), and McCracken (2000), using the terminology and constructs located in the standards of the field—*Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (AASL 1998), *National Board Professional Teaching Standards for Library Media* (AASL 2001), and *ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Programs of School Library Media Specialist Preparation* (AASL 2003).

The survey consisted of statements regarding the teaching role of the library media specialist, the instructional partner role of the library media specialist, and overall contributions that library media specialists make to learning. Principals were asked to rate these statements on a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The survey concluded with an open-ended question: "Think back to a situation or incident which you have had with a library media specialist which helped to form your view of the role of the library media specialist in the school. This incident could be a positive one, or it could be a negative one. Please describe the incident."

Reliability and Validity

Since the survey to be used in this study was developed by the researcher, internal consistency reliability was established using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Theoretical scales for the concepts of "teacher" and "instructional partner" were embedded within the survey. Responses were averaged within each scale resulting in measures of library media specialist as teacher ($\alpha = .896$, $M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.23$) and library media specialist as instructional partner ($\alpha = .922$, $M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.24$).

In the context of the study, construct validity was addressed through the development of the survey instrument based on surveys used by previous researchers (Alexander, Smith, and Carey 2003; Kolencik 2001; McCracken 2000) and based on the standards in the field: *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (AASL 1998), *National Board Professional Teaching Standards for Library Media* (AASL 2001), and *ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Programs of School Library Media Specialist Preparation* (AASL 2003). Content validity was addressed through instrument review by experts in the fields of educational leadership and school library media as well as by practicing elementary school library media specialists. Content validity was also addressed through a pilot study conducted with practicing elementary principals. As needed, the survey instrument was revised on the basis of their feedback.

Data Collection

To improve response rate, as suggested by Dillman (2007), a pre-notice e-mail was sent on May 11, 2007, to the 500 principals who had been selected for the study sample by proportional stratified random sampling. Thirty-eight principals declined to participate; therefore, the first e-mail with survey link went to 462 principals on May 14, 2007. A follow-up reminder e-mail was sent on June 4, and the survey closed on June 19. Sixty-four responses were received, a response rate of 14%. Due to the low number of responses, on August 1, the pre-notice e-mail was sent to the remaining 424 principals for whom e-mail addresses were available who had not been selected for the first round (three principals served two schools each). Thirty-four principals declined to participate; therefore, the first e-mail with survey link was sent to 390 principals on August 6. A follow-up reminder e-mail was sent on August 13, and the survey closed on August 21. From the second sample, an additional 51 responses were received, a response rate of 13%. The two sets of responses submitted through Inquisite were combined for a total of 115 responses. Data analysis showed that five respondents had declined to participate after reading the Informed Consent Form, making the final number of usable responses from both data collections 110, a response rate of 13%.

Data Analysis

Inquisite survey responses were exported into SPSS 13.0 for Windows. Frequency tables were constructed and reported for survey items. Additionally, for research question 3, responses to the open-ended question on the survey were systematically examined within the framework of critical incident theory (Flanagan 1954) using content analysis to identify common key words, categories, and themes (Mitchell and Jolley 2004; Powell and Connaway 2004). Critical incidents were first classified as positive or negative, then further classified as informational (content) or relational (attitudes) (Radford 1996).

Findings

Demographics

Demographic data were gathered to facilitate description of the sample and to allow for determination of its representativeness of the population. Twenty percent of the respondents reported five or fewer years of classroom teaching experience, 28.2 percent reported six to ten years, and 23.6 percent reported eleven to fifteen years. See table 1 for details.

Table 1. Total Years of Classroom Teaching Experience

	Frequency	%
0–5	22	20.0
6–10	31	28.2
11–15	26	23.6
16–20	15	13.6
21–25	8	7.3
Over 25	8	7.3
Total	110	100

When asked to specify their total number of years of administrative experience 14.5 percent of the principals reported one of five years of administrative experience; 41.9 percent reported six

to ten years administrative experience, and 23.6 percent reported 11 to 15 years. See table 2 for details.

Table 2. Total Years of Administrative Experience

	Frequency	%
1–5	16	14.5
6–10	46	41.9
11–15	26	23.6
16–20	12	10.9
21–25	6	5.5
Over 25	4	3.6
Total	110	100

Participants were asked to specify the Superintendents' Regional Study Group in which their schools were located; all regions of Virginia were represented in the sample. Participants were also asked to describe their school settings as either urban or nonurban. While the sample was relatively balanced regionally, it was not as representative of the elementary schools in the state in regard to school setting. Only 25.5 percent of the respondents characterized their schools as urban, while 74.5 percent characterized their schools as nonurban. In contrast, using NCES *Common Core of Data* Locale Codes, 61.5 percent of elementary schools in Virginia are characterized as urban, and 38.5 percent are characterized as nonurban (U.S. Department of Education 2005).

To further describe their schools, participants were asked to specify the grade-level configuration for the school in which they were principal. The most common grade-level configurations reported were PreK-5 (42.2 percent) and K-5 (26.6 percent), but other configurations were noted as well. Participants were also asked to note enrollment at the school in which they were principal. Most schools (72.7 percent) indicated enrollment of 300–749 students; 18.2 percent specified enrollment of 100–299 and 9.1 percent indicated enrollment of 750–1,499.

Teacher Role of the Library Media Specialist

Twelve survey questions dealt with the teacher role of the library media specialist. Three questions asked about teaching students to use various information resources—print, electronic subscription databases, and free websites. Most principals (90.9 percent) responding either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should teach students to use print resources. Almost as many (87.3 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should teach students to use electronic databases, and 81.8 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should teach students to use information found at free websites.

Next, participants were asked about library media specialists teaching students how to locate information within sources, how to evaluate information found, and how to take notes and organize information. Most respondents (94.6 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should teach students how to locate information within sources, 86.4 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should teach students to evaluate information for accuracy and reliability, and 74.6 percent either agreed or strongly

agreed that library media specialists should teach students how to take notes and organize information.

Two questions addressed the topic of library media specialists teaching students to respect intellectual property, practice ethical behavior, and follow acceptable use policy guidelines in their use of information. More than nine out of ten of respondents (93.7 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should teach students to respect intellectual property, cite sources, and respect copyright laws, and 91.9 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should teach students to practice ethical behavior in their use of information by following acceptable use policy guidelines.

Two items on the survey addressed library media specialists' access to and use of standardized test data. Eighty percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should have access to student standardized test data, and 82.8 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should use this data to develop information literacy instruction.

Two survey items addressed library media specialists providing staff development for teachers in effective use of electronic resources and in areas such as intellectual property and copyright. Over 86% (86.4%) of principals responding either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should provide staff development for teachers in areas such as effective Web searching and effective use of subscription databases, and 86.3 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should provide staff development for teachers in the areas of intellectual property and copyright. Details of responses to these questions are shown in table 3.

Table 3. Teacher Role of the Library Media Specialist

Question	% Strongly Disagree	% Disagree	% Neither agree nor disagree	% Agree	% Strongly agree	% No response
Teach students to use print materials	1.8	1.8	5.5	51.8	39.1	0
Teach students to use electronic subscription databases	2.7	2.7	7.3	40.9	46.4	0
Teach students to use information found at free Web sites	2.7	2.7	12.7	51.8	30.0	0
Teach students how to locate information	2.7	1.8	0	25.5	69.1	0.9

Teach students how to evaluate information	2.7	1.8	9.1	36.4	50.0	0
Teach students how to take notes and organize information	2.7	8.2	12.7	46.4	28.2	1.8
Teach students to respect intellectual property	3.6	0	0.9	27.3	66.4	1.8
Teach students to practice ethical behavior	3.6	0	1.8	25.5	66.4	2.7
Have access to standardized student test data	1.8	9.1	9.1	47.3	32.7	0
Use standardized test data to develop information literacy instruction	1.8	6.4	9.1	47.3	35.5	0
Provide staff development for teachers in areas such as effective Web searching and effective use of subscription databases	1.8	3.6	6.4	47.3	39.1	1.8
Provide staff development for teachers in areas such as intellectual property and copyright	1.8	2.7	7.3	43.6	42.7	1.8

Instructional Partner Role of the Library Media Specialist

Eight survey items addressed the instructional partner role of the library media specialist. When asked about library media specialists collaborating with teachers to teach information literacy skills in the context of content curriculum 91.8 percent of principals responding either agreed or strongly agreed that this should occur. When asked about the library media specialist collaborating with individual teachers to plan lessons that integrated information literacy into the curriculum, 85.4 percent of principals responding either agreed or strongly agreed that this should occur. When asked about the library media specialist collaborating with teachers at grade levels to plan lessons that integrated information literacy skills into the curriculum, 91.8 percent of principals responding either agreed or strongly agreed that this should occur.

The next survey item addressed library media specialists collaborating with teachers to teach lessons that integrated information literacy into the curriculum, and the following item addressed library media specialists collaborating with teachers to evaluate student work from lessons integrating information literacy into the curriculum. Almost nine out of ten of principals responding (89.1 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should teach collaboratively with classroom teachers, but only 73.6 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should evaluate student work collaboratively with classroom teachers.

Next, principals were asked their views of the role the library media specialist should play in the school improvement process. Most principals responding (93.6 percent) either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should play an active role in the school improvement process. Details of responses are shown in table 4.

Table 4. Instructional Partner Role of the Library Media Specialist

Question	% Strongly disagree	% Disagree	% Neither agree nor disagree	% Agree	% Strongly agree	% No response
Collaborate with teachers to teach students information literacy skills	2.7	0.9	4.5	32.7	59.1	0
Collaborate with individual teachers to plan lessons	2.7	1.8	10.0	43.6	41.8	0
Collaborate with teachers at grade level to plan lessons	2.7	0	5.5	43.6	48.2	0
Collaborate with teachers	2.7	1.8	6.4	50.0	39.1	0

to teach lessons						
Collaborate with teachers to evaluate student work	2.7	7.3	16.4	50.0	23.6	0
Play an active role in the school improvement plan/process	2.7	0	2.7	29.1	64.5	0.9

Two items questioned principals regarding who should be the primary initiator of teacher–library media specialist collaborations at the individual teacher level and at the school level. Only 11.8 percent of respondents said that the administrator should initiate collaboration at the individual teacher level, while over 38 percent of the respondents said that the administrator should initiate collaboration at the school level; 67.3 percent felt that the library media specialist should be the primary initiator at the individual teacher level, while 57.3 percent felt that the library media specialist should be the primary initiator at the school level. Details of responses are shown in table 5.

Table 5. Initiation of Collaboration

Question	% Administrator	% Library media specialist	% Teacher	% No response
Primary initiator of teacher-library media specialist collaboration at the individual teacher level?	11.8	67.3	20.0	0.9
Primary initiator of teacher-library media specialist collaboration at the school level?	38.2	57.3	2.7	1.8

Source of Principals' Perceptions of Library Media Specialist Instructional Role

Respondents were asked to specify their primary source of knowledge of the instructional role of the library media specialist. Most (65.5 percent) noted that their knowledge of the instructional role of the library media specialist was derived from interactions with library media specialists during their administrative careers, while 26.4 percent stated that their knowledge of the instructional role of the library media specialist was derived from interactions with library media

specialists during their teaching careers. Only 2.7 percent noted that their knowledge came from professional journals, and even fewer (1.8 percent) noted that their knowledge came from coursework during their principal preparation programs. Of the three “other” responses given, two were formerly library media specialists, and one noted that perceptions were formed by “expectations from our library media instructional specialist for the district and best practices.” See table 6 for details.

Table 6. Primary Source of Principals’ Perceptions

	Frequency	%
Coursework in principal preparation program	2	1.8
Interactions with library media specialist during my teaching career	29	26.4
Interactions with library media specialist during my administrative career	72	65.5
Readings in professional journals	3	2.7
Other	3	2.7
No response	1	0.9

As a follow-up question, participants were asked if they received any sort of formal training related to library media specialists during their principal preparation programs. Only 9.1 percent said that they had. Those who responded positively ($n = 10$) were asked to elaborate on the context in which they received training related to library media specialists. Their responses are detailed in table 7.

Table 7. Context of Formal Training in Principal Preparation Program

	Frequency	%
Entire course in school library media	1	10.0
Topic of discussion in several courses	5	50.0
Topic of discussion in one course	3	30.0
Other (Master’s was in library media)	1	10.0

Critical Incidents

An open-ended question at the end of the survey asked participants to elaborate on an incident that helped them form their perception of the role of the library media specialist: “Think back to a situation or incident which you have had with a library media specialist which helped to form your view of the role of the library media specialist in the school. The incident could be a positive one, or it could be a negative one. Please describe the incident.” Of the 110 principals who completed the survey, 83 (75 percent) answered the open-ended question. To facilitate analysis, their responses were first categorized as negative or positive, then as informational/content or relational/attitudes. Common themes were identified.

Negative

Although negative responses were not frequent, two strands emerged in the area of information or content along the theme of a “traditional” library media specialist: library media specialists who do not have current technological skills and library media specialists who do not see the need to teach research or information skills. Regarding the lack of up-to-date computer skills, one respondent described the library media specialist as “a librarian who runs an organized library where students check out books and are read to. . . . We are waiting for her to retire (next year) so that we can get someone who is truly a media specialist.” Another respondent noted, “We are currently moving toward more technology in our program. This had been somewhat of a struggle because my librarian is not as computer savvy as I would like. . . . Ultimately, I would like to see a total integration of library and technology.”

In the area of teaching research or information literacy skills, one respondent stated, “In my experience within this school division, the LMS professionals do not initiate quality lessons with children, but merely manage the circulation of the library.” Another noted, “Six years ago, I inherited a school and school library media specialist that did not see the value in aligning library instruction with the classroom, student data, and instructional needs. The librarian was very traditional in the sense that she delivered her own lessons without regard to what was taking place in the classroom or student learning abilities, levels, or interests.”

Negative responses were more frequent in the relational or attitude area regarding the library media specialist’s interpersonal skills and the environment in place in the library: “My current librarian is retiring and the entire school community is happy to see her go. . . . She gives the impression that she just does not like children. She did not work well with other teachers.” “My current LMS is not a very approachable/cooperative person. I inherited her and she is very self-centered and doesn’t see the BIG picture.” “The library was not a friendly place to be. The teachers and students were intimidated when they visited the library and all of the resources were guarded instead of being freely given for use.” The librarian “ran the library as a fiefdom.” “Students would attempt to access the library during the school day only to find that the library was locked.” “The library should not be a place of hoops to jump through—it should be a welcoming place.”

Positive

In the area of positive comments regarding relationships or attitudes, principals described library media specialists using words such as “welcoming,” “inviting,” and “collaborative.” They described a library media specialist who was “eager to collaborate with classroom teachers in planning instructional programs for students” and one who “was so on board with what each

teacher was teaching and provided excellent resources for them. She liked the children to use the library and come in at other times, not just the assigned time.”

One principal said the librarian was “very enthusiastic and loved children. The library was a fun place for kids to go and they learned to be independent in the library by the librarian and teachers working together.” Another noted that “students were excited to go the library because everything she planned was fun and interesting and pertinent to what we were studying.” Principals characterized library media specialists in positive terms such as “a life-long learner,” an “advocate for the program,” and “a team player who volunteers to participate in the collaborative process.”

They described library media specialists who “effectively interact with other staff members and step out to meet them and provide support,” who “initiated team teaching of social studies,” and “was embedded in the school culture in a positive way.” One respondent noted, “She first made the media center welcoming to students and staff; she encouraged teachers to use her and the media center as a resource by initiating collaboration with a teacher in each department.” Another principal characterized the library media specialist as an “open door, readily available, proactive instructor serving all children.”

Positive comments regarding informational or content-related incidents fit into five categories: connections to Virginia’s Standards of Learning, use of curriculum pacing guides, attention to standardized test scores, teaching of research skills, and staff development in the area of information resources. Ten respondents mentioned the library media specialists’ attention to the Standards of Learning, either by providing resources (“I have had the library media specialist to collect large plastic tubs of materials which support a specific Virginia Standard of Learning”) or by connecting library information lessons to Standards of Learning (SOL) content (“My library media specialist asked to meet with all the teachers to coordinate what she did to go along with the SOL they were teaching in the classroom,” and “she taught lessons in the media center that focused strongly on needed SOL skills”).

Three respondents specifically mentioned library media specialists’ attention to curriculum pacing guides: “She uses the SOL data and our pacing guide to help guide her lessons as well as to offer support to the teachers for their instructional planning.” “She uses each grade level’s pacing guides to plan her library lessons.” “When first developing yearly curriculum maps for each grade level, I recall how our librarian reacted so very positively to having these maps. She was thrilled to know what the content plans were for each grade level so that she could make her plans to support that instruction through the IMP (Information Management Process) used in our school district.”

Three respondents noted special attention of the library media specialist to test scores. The library media specialist “realized that our school’s SOL scores were low in reference materials; she asked me if she could take a lead role in pulling selected students for intense work in this regard. I agreed and I appreciated her initiative.” “Through disseminating test scores as well as scores on the Tests for High Standards, areas of weakness were noted. The media specialist was made aware of these areas, and she worked very closely with the classroom teacher to reinforce material which had been covered in the classroom.” “The library media specialist wanted to review the SOL scores in order to enhance the instructional program for the students.”

Principals related that library media specialists “taught the students research skills.” One stated, “I remember the library media specialist reinforcing research skills with my 6th and 7th graders. This helped me to be more successful as a teacher and my students benefited from the extra reinforcement activities.” She “collaborated with classroom teachers to develop research skills for students . . . she met with teachers the week before for planning and together they developed the media lesson that was supportive of the classroom instruction. . . . The students understood the connection that the media center was an extension of learning. It was not an isolated place we go with no connection to the live learning of the classroom.” One principal also reported, “My librarian presented excellent information to our PTA and staff about using online databases and why they are more reliable than search engines such as Google or Yahoo.”

Expectations for Library Media Specialists

Several principals specifically noted that they based their expectations for the instructional role of their library media specialist on a strong library media specialist with whom they had worked: “In my first job as a teacher, I probably had the chance to work with the best librarian I have seen. . . . I judge all librarians by her.” “I have formed my opinions about the importance of that position by watching how important her role is in our school and seeing how her influence can extend far beyond the walls of the library.” “I was fortunate to work with an outstanding library media specialist who made herself be an integral part of the whole school operation. . . . From her very positive impact, I have carried that expectation on to other school settings to share with library media specialists who had never entertained the idea of working in this manner.” “I worked with a wonderful media specialist. She used lesson plans that coordinated with the grade level standard course of study and integrated regular classroom curriculum into the library experience. . . . She has been the ruler by which I measure other media specialists.”

Discussion

Research Question 1: How do elementary school principals view the library media specialist as a teacher of information literacy skills?

Virginia elementary school principals responding to the survey endorsed the role of the library media specialist as a teacher of information literacy skills. Ninety percent either agreed or strongly agreed that library media specialists should teach students to use print and subscription database resources, but they are slightly more hesitant regarding teaching students to use information found on the free Web, as just over 80 percent either agreed or strongly agreed with library media specialists teaching in this area.

Principals view the library media specialist as one who should teach students to find and to evaluate information (95 percent and 86 percent, respectively), but they consider it more the classroom teacher’s role, or perhaps the instructional technology resource teacher’s role, to teach students to use the information found (75 percent). They strongly endorse the library media specialist’s role to teach students to use information ethically, respecting intellectual property, citing sources, respecting copyright laws (94 percent), and following acceptable use policy guidelines (92 percent).

Eisenberg (2004) suggests that library media specialists familiarize themselves with content area standards, standardized test formats, and questions in order to better connect information literacy instruction to content area curriculum, and Virginia elementary school principals responding to this survey endorsed this activity. Similarly, the literature shows that student achievement is

higher when the library media specialist provides professional development in the area of information technology and takes an active role as a teacher of teachers (Lance, Rodney, and Hamilton-Pennell 2000, 2001; Smith 2001). Virginia elementary school principals support the role of the library media specialist as staff developer in the area of information technology.

Research Question 2: How do elementary school principals view the library media specialist as an instructional partner?

Tallman and van Deusen (1995) noted that library media specialists who met with teams of teachers reported more collaboration than those who met with teachers individually, and Virginia elementary school principals endorsed this practice, with 85 percent supporting collaboration at the individual teacher level and 92 percent at the grade level. The literature shows that when library media specialists take an active role in instruction, partnering and collaborating with classroom teachers to plan, teach, and evaluate instruction, student achievement is higher. Test scores are higher when library media specialists plan instruction with classroom teachers (Lance, Rodney, and Hamilton-Pennell 2000; Rodney, Lance, and Hamilton-Pennell 2002, 2003; Smith 2001). Virginia elementary school principals agree, with 92 percent supporting collaboration to integrate information literacy instruction into content curriculum.

While principals support the library media specialist planning and teaching with the classroom teacher, they are less comfortable with library media specialists evaluating student work, with only 73 percent endorsing this activity. Student achievement is higher when library media specialists teach with classroom teachers (Lance, Rodney, and Hamilton-Pennell 2001; Rodney, Lance, and Hamilton-Pennell 2002; Smith 2001), and standards in the field suggest that library media specialists should collaboratively evaluate students' work (AASL 1998; ALA 2003; NBPTS 2001).

While principals felt that initiation of collaboration was more of an administrative responsibility at the school level (38 percent) than at the individual teacher level (12 percent), in both cases the majority of principals ascribed the responsibility of initiating this collaboration to the library media specialist. Principals serve as the instructional leaders for their schools, and, according to Henri and Hay (1995), their support is a crucial factor in the ability of the library media specialist to influence instruction. Hartzell (2002b) asserts that it is the principal's duty to promote the library's instructional potential with teachers, and Tallman and van Deusen (1995) found that more collaboration occurred in schools where principals set the expectation for collaboration between classroom teachers and library media specialists. Elementary school principals responding to this survey, however, expected library media specialists to be the initiators, to be proactive, and to be advocates for their programs and put themselves in more of a secondary role.

Research Question 3: What is the basis for elementary school principals' views of the instructional role of the library media specialist?

As noted in the literature, principals typically do not receive information regarding the instructional role of the library media specialist in their principal preparation programs (Buchanan 1982; Pearson 1989; Wilson and McNeil 1998). Less than 2 percent of the respondents to this survey indicated that coursework in their principal preparation programs was their primary source of knowledge regarding library media specialists.

Data from this study confirm the findings of Naylor and Jenkins (1988); Campbell (1991); and Alexander, Smith, and Carey (2003). Over 65 percent of the elementary school principals in Virginia responding to the survey indicated that their primary source of knowledge of the instructional role of the library media specialist was derived from interactions with library media specialists during their administrative careers. Over 26 percent stated that their knowledge was derived from interactions with library media specialists during their teaching careers.

Elementary principals in Virginia public schools form their views of the role of the library media specialist in their schools through their interactions with practicing library media specialists. Pearson (1989) suggested that it was the responsibility of the library media specialist to inform and educate the principal concerning the library's potential contribution to student learning. Findings from this study validate Pearson's charge.

Principals who gave negative responses to the open-ended question described interactions with the more traditional, stereotypical librarian who completed conventional library duties but did not effectively instruct or participate as an integral part of student learning. Principals who gave positive responses had interacted with proactive library media specialists who contributed to instruction and learning in their schools. They described library media specialists who collaboratively planned and taught with classroom teachers, who were knowledgeable about curriculum standards, and who worked to align the library program with the overall mission and goals of the school. They also spoke to the lasting influence that a positive library media specialist has on fellow educators.

Limitations

Low Response Rate

The primary limitation of this study comes from the low response rate to the survey. For this study, a proportional stratified random sample of 500 was drawn from the initial sample frame of 927 e-mail addresses. Response to the initial survey was extremely low, $n = 64$, for a response rate of 14 percent. In an attempt to increase the response rate, the survey was then sent to the principals remaining in the sample frame. Response to the second call was low also, $n = 51$, for a response rate of 13 percent. The researcher identified four possible explanations for the low response rate.

One possible explanation is the use of a Web-based survey. Dillman (2007) suggested that careful attention to Web-based survey construction and administration enhances the response rate. He also noted that Internet surveys are appropriate for survey populations with high levels of computer access and proficiency, such as those in the field of education. Although it was not indicated in the pilot study with practicing elementary school principals, it is possible that elementary school principals did not feel comfortable with the Web-based survey and that the format affected the response rate.

A second explanation is the timing of the survey. The original intent was to distribute the survey in early April 2007 and collect data over a three-week period, prior to administration of SOL tests and end-of-year school activities. Due to circumstances beyond the control of the researcher, the survey was not issued until May 14. With testing and the end of the school year, May and June are, admittedly, extremely busy months for principals. The second survey was

distributed in early August, as many principals were beginning to prepare for the upcoming school year, another busy time for principals.

A third explanation for low response rate relates to the larger school divisions in the state. Some principals from larger school divisions contacted the researcher and noted that, although the survey requested personal perceptions and did not request any information regarding the school division, policies, procedures, or personnel, they would not be able to complete it without prior approval from their central offices. In the current data-driven, accountability-oriented educational environment, the expectation for research is well established. Policy makers encourage higher education institutions to conduct research in K-12 settings, yet significant barriers to this collaboration exist.

A fourth explanation for low response rates is strongly grounded in the literature and the premise of the study: principals are not well informed regarding the critical role that library media specialists and library media programs can play in instruction. Numerous research studies demonstrate that when library media specialists teach information literacy skills and collaborate with classroom teachers to plan, teach, and evaluate instruction, student achievement is higher (Lance, Rodney, and Hamilton-Pennell 2000; Rodney, Lance, and Hamilton-Pennell 2002, 2003; Smith 2001). The library media specialist has the potential to positively affect student learning, and administrator support is key in making this happen. When choices regarding activities and tasks must be made, however, libraries rank low on principals' lists of importance. The majority of the 110 elementary principals who responded to this survey seem to be well aware of the strong contributions that the library media specialist makes in the school, and they overwhelmingly endorsed the library media specialists' instructional role. It may be that the principals that did not respond (more than eight hundred) do not value school libraries and do not recognize the potential that exists.

Non-Response Bias

Principals responding to the survey strongly supported the instructional role of the library media specialist, in contrast to the findings from several earlier studies. Only 18 percent of principals surveyed by Naylor and Jenkins (1988) described library media specialists' duties as instructional in nature; Kolencik (2001) noted that principals characterized library media specialists as keepers and circulators of materials; Alexander, Smith, and Carey (2003) found that principals rated learning and teaching as the lowest of five library media specialists' roles. The positive perceptions of the instructional role of the library media specialist by principals in this study are not indicated in the literature. There is a danger of non-response bias. The researcher has no way of accurately knowing the views of the principals who did not respond.

Implications for Current Practice in Applied Settings and for Further Research

Findings from this study provide implications for current practice at the university preparation level, at the professional level, and at the practitioner level. At the university level, there are implications for both educational leadership preparation programs and school library media preparation programs. The research demonstrates that library media specialists who play an active instructional role in their schools positively affect student learning (Lance 2005). As the instructional leader of the school, principals are concerned about student achievement. If students are to achieve at the highest level, the instructional potential of the library media specialist

cannot be overlooked. Of the Virginia elementary school principals responding to this survey, less than 2 percent named coursework in their principal preparation programs as their primary source of information regarding the instructional role of the library media specialist. Only 9.1 percent noted that they had received any sort of formal training related to library media specialists during their principal preparation programs. To best prepare their graduates for their roles as instructional leaders in their schools, university educational leadership programs should add information regarding the instructional role of the library media specialist to their curriculum.

Findings from this study have implications for school library media preparation programs and for state departments of education, school divisions, and professional organizations as well. This research clearly demonstrates that principals learn about the instructional role of the library media specialist from either library media specialists with whom they work as an administrator (65.5 percent) or from library media specialists with whom they worked as a teacher (26.4 percent). School library media preparation programs must prepare their graduates to positively present their key instructional roles. Library media specialists already working in the field must have the opportunity for training and professional development. The importance of communication with administrators, of developing positive interpersonal relationships, and of marketing, public relations, and advocacy for the school library media program should be included in the curriculum of school library media preparation programs. For those library media specialists in the field, training in these areas should be presented in the format of workshops, in-service opportunities, and conference sessions.

For the practicing library media specialist, findings from this study offer both responsibility and challenge. Principals base their perceptions of the instructional role of the library media specialist on interactions they had as classroom teachers and as principals with practicing library media specialists. Principals learn what library media specialists can and should do from library media specialists. This places a tremendous responsibility on library media specialists to implement their instructional roles to the best of their ability in the educational environment in which they work. At the same time, library media specialists face the challenge of maintaining professional skills, keeping up-to-date not only on best instructional practice but also on marketing, public relations, and advocacy skills.

Elementary school principals responding to this survey strongly endorsed the instructional role of the library media specialist as both teacher and instructional partner. Questions in the survey focused on what the library media specialist should do. Based on these findings, additional research should be conducted to determine what activities principals put in place in their schools to facilitate the full implementation of this role. Do principals stress the importance of the library media specialist's instructional role with teachers, as the literature suggests they should (Hartzell 2002b; Master and Master 1988)? Findings from this study demonstrated that principals expect the library media specialist to initiate collaboration with classroom teachers. Do they set the tone and climate for collaboration, and do they provide common planning time to allow collaboration to occur? A follow-up study focusing on principal actions should be conducted.

Summary

Library media specialists who play an active instructional role in their schools positively affect student learning. Principals are instructional leaders in their schools, and their support is critical to full development of the library media specialist's potential. Limitations related to the response

rate notwithstanding, this study provides evidence that Virginia elementary school principals view the library media specialist as a teacher and an instructional partner. It confirms that they develop their perceptions of the library media specialists' instructional role from the library media specialists with whom they work and that they expect library media specialists to be the primary initiators of collaboration within their schools. Armed with the evidence provided by this study, elementary library media specialists should take a proactive role, initiating collaboration with classroom teachers, teaching information literacy skills, and raising principal awareness of the library's contribution to student learning.

Works Cited

- Alexander, L. B., R. C. Smith, and J. O. Carey. 2003. "Education reform and the school library media specialist." *Knowledge Quest* 32(2):10–13.
- American Association of School Librarians (AASL). 1960. *Standards for school library programs*. Chicago: ALA.
- . 1969. *Standards for school media programs*. Chicago: ALA and NEA.
- . 1975. *Media programs: District and school*. Chicago: ALA.
- . 1988. *Information power: Guidelines for school library media programs*. Chicago: ALA.
- . 1998. *Information power: Building partnerships for learning*. Chicago: ALA.
- American Library Association (ALA). 2003. *ALA/AASL standards for initial programs of school library media specialist preparation*. www.ncate.org/documents/ProgramStandards/ala%202001.pdf (accessed Sept. 17, 2006).
- . 2006a. A "highly qualified" librarian in every school library. www.ala.org/ala/washoff/Woissues/washfunding/schlbrfunds/highqualschlbr... (accessed Oct. 21, 2006).
- . 2006b. Position statement on instructional classification. www.ala.org/aasl/aaslproftools/positionstatements/instclass.htm (accessed Oct. 21, 2006).
- Baughman, J. C. 2000. *School libraries and MCAS scores: A paper presented at a symposium, sponsored by the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Simmons College, Boston, Massachusetts*. <http://web.simmons.edu/~baughman/mcas-school-libraries/Baughman%20Paper.pdf> (accessed Oct. 11, 2006).
- Buchanan, W. 1982. The principal and role expectations of the library media specialist. *The Clearing House* 55(6): 253–55.
- Burnell, S. 1978. *Principals' perceptions of actual and ideal roles of the school media specialist*. Ames, Iowa: Ames Community Schools. ERIC Document ED171321.

- Campbell, J. M. 1991. Principal-school library media relations as perceived by selected North Carolina elementary principals and school library media specialists. EdD diss., University of North Carolina.
- Campbell, B. S., and P. A. Cordeiro. 1996. *High school principal roles and implementation themes for mainstreaming information literacy instruction*. Storrs, Conn.: University of Connecticut, School of Education, Department of Educational Leadership U-93. ERIC Document ED399667.
- Craver, K. W. 1986. The changing instructional role of the high school library media specialist: 1950–84. *School Library Media Quarterly* 14(4):183–91.
- Dillman, D. A. 2007. *Mail and internet surveys: The tailored design method*. 2nd ed. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.
- Dorrell, L. D., and V. L. Lawson. 1995. What are principals' perceptions of the school library media specialist? *NASSP Bulletin* 79(2): 72–80.
- Eisenberg, M. B. 2004. It's all about learning: Ensuring that students are effective users of information on standardized tests. *Library Media Connection* 22(6): 22–30.
- Flanagan, J. C. 1954. The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin* 5:327–58.
- Gustafson, L. C. 1982. The leadership role of the public elementary school media librarian as perceived by the principal and its relationship to the factors of the sex, educational background, and the work experience of the media librarian. EdD diss., University of Maryland, College Park.
- Hartzell, G. 2002a. *White House conference on school libraries: What's it take?* www.ims.gov/pubs/whitehouse0602/garyhartzell.htm (accessed Apr. 2, 2005).
- . 2002b. *Why should principals support school libraries?* *ERIC Digest*. Syracuse, N.Y.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology. ERIC Document ED470034.
- Haycock, K. 1989. *Summary of EL research findings to date: What works, research: The implications for professional practice*. Vancouver, B.C.: Emergency Librarian. ERIC Document ED327181.
- Henri, J., and L. Hay. 1995. Teacher-librarians must be principally minded. *School Libraries in Canada* 15(4): 20–21.
- Henri, J., L. Hay, and D. Oberg. 2002. *The role of the principal in an information literate school community: Findings from an international research project*. Glasgow, Scotland: 68th IFLA Council and General Conference, Conference Programme and Proceedings. ERIC Document ED472865.
- Inquisite. 2007. Computer software, version 7.5. Austin, Tex.: Inquisite.

- Kaplan, A. G. 2006. Benign neglect: Principals' knowledge of and attitudes towards school library media specialists. EdD diss., University of Delaware.
- Kolencik, P. L. 2001. Principals and teacher-librarians: Building collaborative partnerships in the learning community. EdD diss., University of Pittsburgh.
- Lance, K. C. 2005. *Powering achievement: The impact of school libraries and librarians on academic achievement*. www.lrs.org/documents/lmcstudies/proof2005.pdf (accessed Sept. 17, 2006).
- Lance, K. C., M. J. Rodney, and C. Hamilton-Pennell. 2000. *How school librarians help kids achieve standards: The second Colorado study*. San Jose, Calif.: Hi Willow.
- . 2001. *Good schools have school librarians: Oregon school librarians collaborate to improve academic achievement*. Terrebonne, Ore.: Oregon Educational Media Association.
- . 2002. *How school libraries improve outcomes for children: The New Mexico study*. Salt Lake City: Hi Willow.
- . 2005. *Powerful libraries make powerful learners: The Illinois study*. Canton, Il.: Illinois School Library Media Association.
- Lance, K. C., M. J. Rodney, and B. Russell. 2007. *How students, teachers, and principals benefit from strong libraries*. Indianapolis: Association for Indiana Media Educators.
- Lau, D. 2002. What does your boss think of you? *School Library Journal* 48(9): 52–55.
- Marcoux, B. 2005. Perceptions of the role and functions of the school library professional in K-12 education by school principals. In *Educational media and technology yearbook, 2005 edition, Volume thirty*, ed. M. Orey, J. McClendon, and R. M. Branch, 225–35. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited.
- Master, L., and N. L. Master. 1988. *A 1988 statewide survey of Nevada school librarians' self-perceptions as instructional leaders in their schools*. Las Vegas: Clark County Nevada Schools. ERIC Document ED300016.
- McCracken, A. 2000. Perceptions of school library media specialists regarding their roles and practices. PhD diss., George Mason University.
- Mitchell, M., and J. Jolley. 2004. *Research design explained*. 5th ed. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/Thomson.
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). 2001. *NBPTS library media standards*. www.nbpts.org/the_standards/standards_by_cert?ID=19&x=56&y=5 (accessed Sept. 17, 2006).

- National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA). 2002. *Standards for advanced programs in educational leadership*. [www.npbea.org/ELCC/ELCCStandards%20 5-02.pdf](http://www.npbea.org/ELCC/ELCCStandards%205-02.pdf) (accessed Oct. 24, 2006).
- Naylor, A. P., and K. D. Jenkins. 1988. An investigation of principals' perceptions of library media specialists' performance evaluation technology. *School Library Media Quarterly* 16(3): 234–43.
- Oberg, D. 1996. *Principal support—what does it mean to teacher-librarians?* Worcester, England: Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship. ERIC Document ED400851.
- Pearson, R. C. 1989. *A critical relationship: Rural and small school principals and librarians*. ERIC Document ED390589.
- Powell, R. R., and L. S. Connaway. 2004. *Basic research methods for librarians*. 4th ed. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited.
- Radford, M. L. 1996. Communication theory applied to reference encounter: An analysis of critical incidents. *Library Quarterly* 66(2), 123(15). InfoTrac OneFile database (accessed Sept. 19, 2006).
- Rodney, M. J., K. C. Lance, and C. Hamilton-Pennell. 2002. *Make the connection: Quality school library media programs impact academic achievement in Iowa*. Bettendorf, Iowa: Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency.
- . 2003. *The impact of Michigan school librarians on academic achievement: Kids who have libraries succeed*. Lansing: Library of Michigan.
- Smith, E. G. 2001. *Texas school libraries: Standards, resources, services, and students' performance*. Austin, Tex.: EGS Research and Consulting.
- SPSS. 2004. Computer software, version 13.0. Chicago: SPSS.
- Tallman, J. I., and J. D. van Deusen. 1995. Is flexible scheduling always the answer? Some surprising results from a national study. In *School library media annual 1995, Volume thirteen*, ed. J. L. McQuiston and C. L. Saretsky, 201–205. Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited.
- Todd, R. J., and C. C. Kuhlthau. 2004. *Student learning through Ohio school libraries: Background, methodology, and report of findings*. www.oelma.org/StudentLearning.htm (accessed Oct. 11, 2006).
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences. 2005. *Search for public school districts, common core of data*. <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/index.asp> (accessed Dec. 6, 2006).

- . 2006. *Current expenditures for public elementary and secondary education: School year 2003–04*. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/Expenditures/b1.asp> (accessed Jan. 20, 2007).
- Van Hamersveld, C. E. 2007. A survey of school administrators' beliefs regarding the potential of school library programs to impact student achievement. PhD diss., Capella University.
- Veltze, L. 1992. School library media program information in the principalship preparation program. In *School library media annual 1992, Volume ten*, ed. J. B. Smith and J. G. Coleman, Jr., 129–34. Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited.
- Virginia Department of Education. 2006a. *Local schools and centers 2006–07*. www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Publications/schcnt_06lcl.htm (accessed Nov. 9, 2006).
- . 2006b. *School divisions*. www.doe.virginia.gov/Div/index.html#Schl (accessed Nov. 12, 2006).
- . 2007. *2007 Standards of quality as amended*. www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/suptsmemos/2007/inf136b.pdf (accessed Feb. 24, 2008).
- Virginia Department of Education, Division of Teacher Education and Licensure. 1998. *Virginia licensure regulations for school personnel, effective July 1, 1998*. Richmond, Va.: Virginia Department of Education. www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Compliance/TeacherED/nulicvr.pdf (accessed Dec. 8, 2006).
- Wilson, P. J., and M. Blake. 1993. The missing piece: A school library media center component in principal-preparation programs. *Record in Educational Leadership* 12(2): 65–68.
- Wilson, P. P., and A. J. MacNeil. 1998. In the dark: What's keeping principals from understanding libraries? *School Library Journal* 44(9): 114–16.

Cite This Article

Church, Audrey. 2008. "The Instructional Role of the Library Media Specialist as Perceived by Elementary School Principals." <<http://www.ala.org/aasl/slmr/volume11/church>>

Survey: Elementary School Principals' Perceptions of the Instructional Role of the Library Media Specialist

Section One: The Teacher Role of the Library Media Specialist

Directions: Please read each of the following statements and select the answer that best represents your response. Answer choices are Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither disagree nor agree, Agree, Strongly agree.

1. My library media specialist should teach students to use **print materials** to write reports and complete classroom projects.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
2. My library media specialist should teach students to use **electronic subscription databases** which contain journal articles and other reference material (*eLibrary*, *SIRS Discoverer*, and *Kids InfoBits*) to write reports and complete classroom projects.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
3. My library media specialist should teach students to use information found at **free Web sites** to write reports and complete classroom projects.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
4. My library media specialist should teach students how to **locate** information contained in print and electronic sources.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
5. My library media specialist should teach students how to **evaluate** information for accuracy and reliability before using it in a report or project.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
6. My library media specialist should teach students how to take notes and how to organize information to be **used** in a report or project.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree

- c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
7. My library media specialist should teach students to **respect intellectual property** (avoid plagiarism, cite sources, respect copyright laws).
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
8. My library media specialist should teach students to **practice ethical behavior** by following acceptable use policy guidelines in their use of information.
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
9. My library media specialist should have access to standardized student test data.
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
10. My library media specialist should use standardized student test data as he/she develops information literacy instruction.
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
11. My library media specialist should provide staff development for teachers in areas such as effective searching on the World Wide Web and effective use of electronic subscription databases.
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
12. My library media specialist should provide staff development for teachers in areas such as intellectual property and copyright.
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree

Section Two: The Instructional Partner Role of the Library Media Specialist

Directions: Please read each of the following statements and select the answer that best represents your response. Answer choices are Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither disagree nor agree, Agree, Strongly agree.

13. My library media specialist should collaborate with teachers to teach students **information literacy skills** (accessing, evaluating, and using information) in the context of content curriculum.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
14. My library media specialist should collaborate with **individual** teachers to **plan** lessons which integrate information literacy into the curriculum.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
15. My library media specialist should collaborate with teachers **at grade level** to **plan** lessons which integrate information literacy into the curriculum.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
16. My library media specialist should collaborate with teachers to **teach** lessons which integrate information literacy into the curriculum.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
17. My library media specialist should collaborate with teachers to **evaluate student work** from lessons which integrate information literacy into the curriculum.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree
18. My library media specialist should play an active role in the school improvement plan/process.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Neither disagree nor agree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Strongly agree

Section Three: Overall Contributions of Library Media Specialist to Instruction

Directions: Please read each of the following statements and select the answer that best represents your response.

19. My library media specialist should be a(n) (Check all that apply)
 - a. Advocate for the Library Program
 - b. Instructional Leader
 - c. Instructional Partner
 - d. Master Teacher
 - e. Member of the Leadership Team/Principal's Advisory Council
 - f. Other (please specify)
20. Who should be the primary initiator of teacher-library media specialist collaboration at the **individual teacher** level? (Check one)
 - a. Administrator
 - b. Library media specialist
 - c. Teacher
21. Who should be the primary initiator of teacher-library media specialist collaboration at the **school** level? (Check one)
 - a. Administrator
 - b. Library media specialist
 - c. Teacher
22. What would you specify as the **primary** source of your knowledge of the instructional role of the library media specialist? (Check one)
 1. Coursework in my principal preparation program
 2. Interactions with library media specialists during my teaching career
 3. Interactions with library media specialists during my administrative career
 4. Presentations at conferences which I have attended
 5. Readings in professional journals
 6. Other (please specify)

Section Four: Demographics

Directions: Please respond to each of the following questions.

23. Superintendents' Regional Study Group in which your school is located (Check one)
 - a. Region 1: Charles City County, Chesterfield County, Colonial Heights City, Dinwiddie County, Goochland County, Hanover County, Henrico County, Hopewell City, New Kent County, Petersburg City, Powhatan County, Prince George County, Richmond City, Surry County, Sussex County
 - b. Region 2: Accomack County, Chesapeake City, Franklin City, Hampton City, Isle of Wight County, Newport News City, Norfolk City, Northampton County, Poquoson City, Portsmouth City, Southampton County, Suffolk City, Virginia Beach City, Williamsburg-James City County, York County
 - c. Region 3: Caroline County, Colonial Beach, Essex County, Fredericksburg City, Gloucester County, King and Queen County, King George County, King William County, Lancaster County, Mathews County, Middlesex County, Northumberland County, Richmond County, Spotsylvania County, Stafford County, West Point, Westmoreland County
 - d. Region 4: Alexandria City, Arlington County, Clarke County, Culpeper County, Fairfax City, Fairfax County, Falls Church City, Fauquier County, Frederick

- County, Loudoun County, Madison County, Manassas City, Manassas Park City, Orange County, Page County, Prince William County, Rappahannock County, Shenandoah County, Warren County, Winchester City
- e. Region 5: Albemarle County, Amherst County, Augusta County, Bath County, Bedford City, Bedford County, Buena Vista City, Campbell County, Charlottesville City, Fluvanna County, Greene County, Harrisonburg City, Highland County, Lexington City, Louisa County, Lynchburg City, Nelson County, Rockbridge County, Rockingham County, Staunton City, Waynesboro City
 - f. Region 6: Alleghany County, Botetourt County, Covington City, Craig County, Danville City, Floyd County, Franklin County, Henry County, Martinsville City, Montgomery County, Patrick County, Pittsylvania County, Roanoke City, Roanoke County, Salem City
 - g. Region 7: Bland County, Bristol City, Buchanan County, Carroll County, Dickenson County, Galax City, Giles County, Grayson County, Lee County, Norton City, Pulaski County, Radford City, Russell County, Scott County, Smyth County, Tazewell County, Washington County, Wise County, Wythe County
 - h. Region 8: Amelia County, Appomattox County, Brunswick County, Buckingham County, Charlotte County, Cumberland County, Greensville County, Halifax County, Lunenburg County, Mecklenburg County, Nottoway County, Prince Edward County
24. School setting (Check one)
- a. Urban
 - b. Non-urban
25. Grade level configuration which best describes the school in which you are principal (Check one)
- a. PreK-2
 - b. K-2
 - c. 3-5
 - d. PreK-5
 - e. K-5
 - f. Other (please specify)
26. School enrollment (Check one)
- a. 1 to 99
 - b. 100 to 299
 - c. 300 to 749
 - d. 750 to 1499
 - e. 1500 and above
27. Type of schedule on which library operates (Check one)
- a. Fixed, defined as the method of scheduling class time in the library media center for instruction or use of resources on a regular basis (usually weekly)
 - b. Flexible, defined as the method of scheduling class time in the library media center based on the library media specialist and teacher(s) planning together for instruction or use of resources based on student learning needs within a curriculum unit
 - c. Mixed/Combination, defined as the method of scheduling class time in library which includes classes in some grades visiting the library on a fixed schedule (ex. K-2) while classes in other grades visit the library on a flexible schedule (ex. 3-5)

28. Total years of classroom teaching experience which you have (Check one)
 - a. Dropdown menu here, 0 to 25 years, Over 25
29. Content area(s) you taught as classroom teacher (Check all that apply)
 - a. Dropdown menu here, use SOL content area as choices plus other
30. Grade level(s) you taught as classroom teacher (Check all that apply)
 - a. PreK-2
 - b. 3-5
 - c. 6-8
 - d. 9-12
31. Total years of administrative experience which you have (including the current academic year) (Check one)
 - a. Dropdown menu here, 0 to 25 years, Over 25
32. In your principal preparation program, did you receive any sort of formal training related to library/media specialists?
 - a. No
 - b. Yes If yes, in what context? (Check one)
 - a. Entire course in school library media
 - b. Topic of discussion in several courses
 - c. Topic of discussion in one course
 - d. Presentation from guest lecturer
 - e. Other? (please specify)

Open-ended Question:

Directions: Please respond to the following open-ended question in the space provided.

“Think back to a situation or incident which you have had with a library media specialist which helped to form your view of the role of the library media specialist in the school. This incident could be a positive one, or it could be a negative one. Please describe the incident.”

Thank you very much for completing this survey. If you have any questions or are interested in the results of this research study, please feel free to contact the researcher at churchaa@vcu.edu.

School Library Media Research (ISSN: 1523-4320) is the successor to *School Library Media Quarterly Online* and the predecessor to *School Library Research*, an official journal of the American Association of School Librarians. The purpose of *School Library Media Research* is to promote and publish high quality original research concerning the management, implementation, and evaluation of school library programs. The journal also emphasizes research on instructional theory, teaching methods, and critical issues relevant to the school library profession. Visit the [website](#) for more information.



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS
a division of the American Library Association

The mission of the American Association of School Librarians is to advocate excellence, facilitate change, and develop leaders in the school library field. Visit the [AASL website](#) for more information.