The implementation of a flexible schedule in an elementary library setting

Carrie Foell

University of Northern Iowa
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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to explore the use of flexible scheduling in an elementary school in a suburban district in Iowa. The questions asked in this study were:

1. How did the district accommodate teachers' needs for planning time when they moved to a flexible library schedule that included team teaching in the library?
2. How did teacher librarians integrate information literacy skills with the content area standards and benchmarks (i.e. Curriculum mapping, joint planning)?
3. How effective is the collaboration in improving student learning in content areas (literacy, science, social studies) as well as information literacy?
4. On what do stakeholders base their claim for success of the implementation of flexible scheduling?

A qualitative case study was conducted. The researcher observed the use of flexible scheduling in a suburban elementary school in Iowa. The researcher also interviewed the teacher librarian, principal, and three teachers who participate in the flexible scheduling in the library.

The study found that most of the stakeholders involved in this school's academic performance were in favor of the flexible schedule. The relationship between flexible scheduling and the success of student learning depends largely on the active support from administration as well as positive relationships between the classroom teachers and the teacher librarian.

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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE IN AN ELEMENTARY LIBRARY SETTING

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the
Division of School Library Studies
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Carrie Foell

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This Research Paper by: Carrie Foell

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has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Approved: 4/29/2011
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Cognitive theory suggests that in order to make learning meaningful, "we need to associate learning in one setting with another, contextualize our learning, relate new learning to existing schemata and construct meaning for ourselves" (van Deusen, 1995). Flexible scheduling in the school media center can be a successful way to make learning meaningful. Teacher librarians using a flexible schedule open up time in the library for students to visit on a point of need basis leading to greater retention and application of knowledge.

According to Iowa guidelines, one of the TL's roles is to teach information literacy and support the school curriculum; "This curriculum is generally referred to as information literacy and is best learned when information skills and concepts are integrated with classroom content in all areas" (State Library of Iowa and Iowa Department of Education, 2007). Having a flexible schedule allows TLs to collaborate with classroom teachers to plan units of study that will incorporate both classroom content and information literacy skills. It also allows students to learn about materials in a real world context, rather than in isolation; whereas waiting a week until the class's regularly scheduled library period is inappropriate and counterproductive (Stripling, 2003).

The American Association of School Librarians issued a position statement in 1991 that has promoted the use of flexible schedules for over sixteen years, citing standards for the requirement that the library schedule be flexible, allowing point of need
access to students and teachers throughout the school day. Given that the AASL is the association to which teacher librarians look for guidance and support for their success as an educator, it is a quandary as to why elementary schools are not more open to the idea of flexible scheduling.

Studies have been completed showing how many elementary schools participate in flexible scheduling. The National Center for Educational Statistics, surveyed teacher librarians in two separate school years, five years apart (Creighton, 2007). They found that in the 1993-1994 school year, only 17% of the public elementary school librarians reported having a flexible schedule. Five years later, there was only a 4.6% increase in those having a flexible schedule. Teacher librarians find it difficult to gain the support from their administrators for the use of flexible scheduling. The main cause for this lack of support would be teacher contracts, "which guarantee teachers duty-free preparation periods by scheduling weekly times for art, music, physical education, health, and the media center" ("We’re Going to Flexible Scheduling—Now What?,” 2004).

**Problem Statement**

A failure to adopt flexible library scheduling in Iowa elementary schools may have implications for the integration of the library curriculum with other content area student learning goals.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore the use of flexible scheduling in an elementary school in a suburban district in Iowa.
Research Questions

1. How did the district accommodate teachers' needs for planning time when they moved to a flexible library schedule that included team teaching in the library?

2. How did teacher librarians integrate information literacy skills with the content area standards and benchmarks (i.e. Curriculum mapping, joint planning)?

3. How effective is the collaboration in improving student learning in content areas (literacy, science, social studies) as well as information literacy?

4. On what do stakeholders base their claim for success of the implementation of flexible scheduling?

Assumption

This researcher assumes that although flexible scheduling is not uncommon in the secondary schools, it is rarely used in the elementary realm.

Limitation

One limitation that may affect the reliability of this study is that it is based upon one elementary school district in Iowa that incorporates flexible scheduling in the library.

Definitions

Flexible scheduling—"a plan wherein classes meet for instruction in the library resource center when they have a specific need driven by activity in their classroom" (van Deusen, 1996).

Mixed scheduling—"a combination of flexible and fixed schedules" (van Deusen and Tallman, 1994, p. 19).
Teacher Librarian— “School librarians collaborate with others to provide instruction, learning strategies, and practice in using the essential learning skills needed in the 21st century” (AASL, 2009, p. 3).
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The research that was reviewed in this section falls into three categories: flexible scheduling as a positive way for teacher librarians and classroom teachers to collaborate, principals' expectations on the implementation of flexible scheduling, and teacher librarian involvement in curriculum.

Positive Effects of Flexible Scheduling

Although the term flexible scheduling became prevalent in the vocabulary of teacher librarians in the late 80s, McGregor (2006) noticed a significant difference between the use of this type of scheduling in the secondary schools and elementary schools. It was evident that the secondary schools used the library as an extension of the classroom and used this resource as the learning called for it. As for the elementary schools, the library was viewed in a more isolated manner. Many elementary teacher librarians realized the need for providing classroom support for learning at the point of need, but "the long established routines of weekly visits to the library for a story, a lesson, or a borrowing session are difficult to break away from, with the recognition of other possible formats not necessarily understood or valued" (para. 3). McGregor stated that her purpose for this study was to find out how those teacher librarians working with flexible scheduling were able to implement that program successfully. McGregor (2006) based her study on two assumptions: flexible scheduling is desirable and the outcomes are worthwhile.
Six elementary schools were chosen to participate in this study. They were required to meet the following criteria: flexible scheduling had to have been in place for at least two years, no outside funding could have been used to implement the program, the current teacher librarian had to be the one who put the implementation into action, and at least 75% of the teaching faculty were in agreement that the flexible schedule was worthwhile. McGregor gathered some comparable data among the schools through a semi-structured interview of three classroom teachers (grade 1 to 3, grade 4 to 5, and one randomly selected), the principal, and the teacher librarian. Each teacher and principal was interviewed once and the teacher librarian was interviewed twice; the second time being two and a half years after the original data was collected. Interviews were conducted around six themes the Delphi study had identified as being significant to successful implementation of a flexible schedule: support for the schedule by teachers and principals, the necessity for the schedule, the importance of teachers and librarians understanding the concepts and advantages behind the flexible scheduling, the ongoing need for implementation (it is always a work in progress), barriers that may be holding back the implementation of the flexible schedule, and the importance of school variables, such as student population, associate help, and teaching philosophies.

McGregor found that the principals viewed the flexible schedule as a tool to help teachers and librarians collaborate and integrate school curriculum. There was a concern that some teachers would not take full advantage of the library program if not forced to do so. Principals labeled themselves as supporters and partners, but gave most of the credit for the success to the teacher librarians. The teachers who were interviewed
conveyed positive attitudes toward flexible scheduling. One fourth grade teacher noted, after being asked about losing planning time, “You need to look at it the other way to see that the students really benefit the most, it depends on who we’re here to benefit, I guess—for the benefit of the teacher or the benefit of the students, being able to learn some real-life skills” (The teachers’ voices section, para. 6). The teacher librarians agreed that the most effective factor in the success of the flexible schedule was the support from the school principal. They spent most of their interviews discussing the many things they were doing with the students and teachers as well as giving advice to other teacher librarians who wanted to initiate a conversation about flexible scheduling with their principals.

Flexible scheduling also has a positive effect on the amount of time teacher librarians spend collaborating with classroom teachers. van Deusen (1996) was interested in how teacher librarians spent their time during the school day and wanted to find out if using a flexible schedule might impact the use of time differently. She focused her research around two research questions: “How do elementary library media specialists spend their time?” and “What are the effects of five independent variables on the ways in which elementary school library media specialists spend their time?” (para. 4).

The participants for van Deusen’s (1996) study were selected from membership in the Iowa Educational Media Association, which is the state professional association affiliate of the American Association of School Librarians in the state of Iowa. Members numbering 177 were identified as elementary school librarians and were sent a
questionnaire focusing on their school and professional assignment. Participants were
also asked to keep a record of their activity, every 15 minutes, for two dates in 1995. Of
the 177 members of the Iowa association, 90 responded to the questionnaire. Each of the
activities recorded in the questionnaire was coded into one of fifteen categories:
electronic support, teaching, story time, reading guidance, consulting, supervision,
management, cataloging, professional development, planning, selection, clerical,
circulation, and personal. In analyzing the data of these activities, van Deusen found that
management tasks, such as professional development and selection tasks, must have
"occurred beyond the standard working day or occurred so seldom that fewer than half of
the respondents did these tasks during the data collection (Results section, para. 3).

With regards to flexible scheduling, there was a small drop in teaching instances,
but nothing significant to diminish the teaching role of the teacher librarian. In fact,
individual assistance to students was higher in elementary schools that used a flexible
schedule. This is due to the intent of the flexible schedule being to have open access for
students, who sought out and received the assistance that they needed. The flexible
schedule also allowed for more planning time spent with teachers.

Besides more planning time, flexible scheduling allowed for an increased number
examined the relationship between library schedules and circulation. They hypothesized
that "school libraries that use a totally flexible schedule will have significantly different
circulation per pupil than those using a fixed schedule" (Research question and
hypothesis Section, para. 1). An online survey, consisting of 22 questions, was created
and given to 600 random school library media specialists in North Carolina and Virginia. Of those 600 media specialists, 176 responded that they would be willing to participate. Since scheduling is an issue for elementary schools, the 176 were narrowed down to 88 library media specialists who taught in an elementary school.

The results of the survey were collected using Inquisite software and analyzed using SPSS 16.0 statistical software. "Correlational analysis was used to examine the correlation between library schedule, school factors, and circulation" (Analytic approach section, para. 1). Once all of the school factors, "type of school, location, socioeconomic status, funding, staffing, collection size, loss, circulation restrictions, and total days closed" (Analytic approach section, para. 1), were accounted for, Gavigan, Pribesh, & Dickinson found that on average, elementary students in schools with fixed schedules checked out, on average, 51 books in a school year, while mixed scheduled schools had students checking out an average of 46 books. Schools with a flexible schedule reported that students checked out an average of 71 books in a year. This study's findings suggest that there is a significant increase in per pupil circulation numbers with the use of a flexible schedule. Even though professional library associations endorse flexible schedules as best practice, it is still not a universally accepted practice in elementary school libraries.

**Principals' Expectations on Implementation**

In a study on the success of implementing flexible scheduling in elementary schools across the United States, McGregor (2002) focused on the role of the school principal in the execution of this type of scheduling in the elementary school.
McGregor’s purpose for this study was to “explore effective flexible scheduling implementation in elementary school library media centers in order to determine how successful implementation occurs and to identify factors that affect that success” (p. 75). The study started out with a preliminary Delphi study that set the following factors on the implementation of flexible scheduling:

- Support for flexible scheduling
- The necessity and effect of pre-existing factors
- The importance of teachers’ and school librarians’ understanding of the concept and the advantages gained from those understandings
- Ongoing needs during implementation
- Barriers to implementation
- The importance of a number of variables such as school size, clerical help, and teaching philosophies (p. 76)

To create a population for her study, McGregor enlisted the help of expert groups around the U.S. to recommend elementary school teacher librarians who were employed in schools with flexible scheduling for at least two years, did not received additional funding for the implementation of the new scheduling, and that the current teacher librarian was the person in charge of implementing the flexible schedule. Twenty-one teacher librarians fit all three criteria and six final schools were chosen from there based on the willingness of the principal to participate in an interview and that the majority of the classroom teachers would agree that the implementation of a flexible schedule was successful. The teacher librarian, principal, and three classroom teachers from the six chosen schools were asked to participate in a telephone interview consisting of open-ended and qualitative questions relating to their roles, perceptions, and understanding of a flexible schedule.
For the sake of this study, McGregor focused on the principals' views, understandings, and roles in the implementation on flexible scheduling. Principals, for the most part, saw flexible schedules as a positive way for providing opportunities for collaborative planning between the classroom teacher and teacher librarian. They also found students becoming more independent in their learning and encountering more relevant experiences in the library. Although principals described their school libraries as learner-centered places now that a flexible schedule was in place, they also were concerned with the potential logistic problem of the facility and teacher librarian being too busy to accommodate all who were needing or wanting access to the library. Most principals viewed their role in this scheduling process as “cheerleaders, advocates, supporters, communicators, enforcers, promoters, and enablers” (McGregor, 2002, p. 78). The teacher librarians were given most of the credit for having the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make this program work.

**Teacher Librarian Involvement in Curriculum**

van Deusen (1993) developed a study to determine the effects of fixed and flexible schedules on curriculum involvement. The questions she posed for her study inquired if a library program with a flexible schedule provided more integration of the library skills into curricular content as well as providing the teacher librarian more involvement in the curriculum than a fixed schedule. van Deusen conducted a six-week study where teacher librarians and fifth grade classroom teachers from Iowa were surveyed on the types of units that were taught in the classroom and for how many of those the teacher librarian was consulted as a resource for the units.
Participants in this study were selected from nine school districts in Iowa that exceeded 3,000 students and who had a district-level library media coordinator (Selection of the sample section, para. 4). The district-level coordinator recommended seventy-one teacher librarians. The teacher librarians were divided into two categories: teacher librarians who use a fixed schedule, and teacher librarians who incorporate a flexible schedule in their classes. Of the 71 teacher librarians, 33 worked with a fixed schedule while 38 used a flexible schedule. van Deusen administered a questionnaire to these teacher librarians and their fifth grade teachers. Eighty-six percent of the participants responded to the survey. The questionnaires were “coded for fixed scheduling and for flexible scheduling” (Data Analysis: Instructional Consultation section, para. 1).

van Deusen found that “programs employing a flexible schedule were found to have significantly more occurrences of teacher librarian involvement in evaluation of instructional units than programs with a fixed schedule” (Curriculum Involvement section, para. 2). It was also found that the combination of a flexible schedule and team planning produced more teacher librarian involvement than when planning individually. Although the study showed increased curriculum involvement, there was no significant evidence showing that the type of scheduling, alone, improved skills integration between library skills and classroom curriculum.

van Deusen & Tallman (1994) also examined the differences in curriculum involvement in schools that used flexible scheduling and those schools that used fixed schedules. To help guide van Deusen & Tallman in their study, they focused on two roles of the teacher librarian: consultative role (Do teacher librarians in schools with a flexible
schedule engage in more consultative tasks?) and the teaching role (In a flexible schedule, are more information skills lessons taught in connection with classroom curriculum and do teacher librarians participate more in the assessment of student achievement?). The investigators used a random sampling of 1500 elementary school library media specialists who taught at least three grade levels including third or fourth grade. Of the 1500 teacher librarians invited, 502 responded with the willingness to participate, but only 381 responded to the questionnaire completely and accurately.

Participants in this study were asked to list curriculum units they were involved in during a certain six-week period, along with a description of their involvement in terms of five specific consultative tasks:

- Gather materials for a classroom unit (Gather)
- Collaborate with the teacher in the design of the objectives of a classroom unit (Identify)
- Collaborate with the teacher in the design of teaching/learning activities (Plan)
- Teach the unit collaboratively with the teacher (Teach)
- Collaborate with the teacher in evaluating the unit (Evaluate)

Along with the descriptions for their units they were involved in, teacher librarians were also asked questions that detailed the planning culture of the school, and the principal’s expectations for collaboration between classroom teachers and teacher librarians.

The results of the questionnaire supported the use of flexible or mixed scheduling in order to improve curriculum discussions between teachers and teacher librarians. The study showed that teacher librarians with flexible or mixed scheduling had “significantly more occurrences of four of the five curriculum consultation variables than fixed schedule sites” (Results section, para. 7). The study also showed that flexible and mixed
schedule sites were superior to the fixed scheduled sites when it came to curriculum planning with individual teachers or teams of teachers. This accounts for these teacher librarians teaching more information skills lessons in connection with the classroom curriculum. It was also found that the support and expectations for collaboration was high with the principals of those sites that used flexible or mixed schedules.

In the third part of their 1993-1994 AASL/Highsmith Research Award study, Tallman and van Deusen focused on three aspects of teacher librarian planning: “amount of time spent planning per unit, number of planning sessions per unit, and participants in the planning process” as well as looking at the relationship between scheduling methods and consultation and teaching activities (p. 33). The researchers analyzed the data collected from the teacher librarians’ reports on instructional units they participated in during a selected six-week time period. The total units reported equaled 3,056.

Through this analysis, the researchers found that even though there were more teacher librarians who had a fixed schedule (n=206) than a flexible schedule (n=95), the teacher librarians using a flexible schedule created twice as many collaboratively planned units with classroom teachers than those who followed a fixed schedule. According to the questionnaires the teacher librarians completed, many fixed scheduled teacher librarians reported that they were unavailable to collaborate with classroom teachers because they had classes during the teachers’ planning times. Flexible schedules allow teacher librarians the flexibility to set up times to meet with teachers to plan units together, which also gave them freedom with the amount of time the collaboration team met to discuss and create the collaborative units.
Summary

Flexible scheduling entered the teacher librarian vocabulary in the early 80s but it has taken many years for the concept to be acclimated in the elementary school library. Researchers have found that there are many positive effects a flexible schedule has on student achievement. These positive effects include the teacher librarians with flexible schedules collaborate to create two times as many integrated lessons as those with fixed schedules (Tallman and van Deusen, 1994). Elementary school principals viewed a flexible schedule as a tool to help teachers and librarians collaborate and integrate school curriculum. They also credited the success of the flexible schedule to the teacher librarians’ implementation and promotion within the library (McGregor, 2006). Other researchers found that a flexible schedule allows for more planning time spent with teachers and increased number of books circulated in the library collection. It was also noted that individual assistance to students was higher in elementary schools that used a flexible schedule (van Deusen, 1996; Gavigan, Pribesh, & Dickinson, 2010).
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research explored the use of flexible scheduling in an elementary school in a suburban school district in Iowa. Teacher librarians using a flexible schedule are able to make time available in the library for students to visit on an as needed basis leading to greater retention and application of knowledge. Gavigan, Pribesh, and Dickinson’s (2010) study suggests that there is also a significant increase in per pupil circulation numbers in schools using a flexible schedule. In one of van Deusen’s (1994) studies, programs employing a flexible schedule were found to have significantly more occurrences of teacher librarian involvement in evaluation of instructional units than programs with a fixed schedule. This qualitative case study analyzed the data collected for successful ways the suburban Iowa elementary school’s teacher librarian, principal, and classroom teachers participate in flexible scheduling. This researcher focused on the following research questions.

1. How did the district accommodate teachers’ needs for planning time when they moved to a flexible library schedule that included team teaching in the library?
2. How did teacher librarians integrate information literacy skills with the content area standards and benchmarks (i.e. Curriculum mapping, joint planning)?
3. How effective is the collaboration in improving student learning in content areas (literacy, science, social studies) as well as information literacy?
4. On what do stakeholders base their claim for success of the implementation of flexible scheduling?
Research Design

This study was a qualitative study on the usefulness of flexible scheduling and the effects it may have with the integration of information literacy skills and classroom instruction at the elementary school level. Creswell (2008) describes qualitative research as "an inquiry approach useful for describing trends and explaining the relationship among variables found in the literature" (p. 645). The researcher used a qualitative case study to explore flexible scheduling in a suburban Iowa elementary school. This afforded the study a variety of inquiry tools, such as interviews and observations as methods of collecting data "to develop an in-depth understanding of the case" (p. 477). According to Creswell, a case study "is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system" (p. 476) allowing this researcher to explore the success of flexible scheduling within this suburban school district.

Population

This researcher purposefully selected the site of one suburban Iowa elementary school that has a full time, certified teacher librarian. Creswell (2008) describes purposeful sampling as a way for researchers to intentionally select the individuals and sites for his or her study to learn more about a critical phenomenon. In this researcher’s case, the teacher librarian has been at the school for many years and has had the opportunity to see the change in scheduling methodologies from fixed to flexible scheduling. Many classroom teachers at this elementary school were present during the implementation of the flexible schedule. Though the principal was new to this school, his
viewpoint and expectations of a flexible schedule provided perspective of an administrator who may not have been familiar with this type of scheduling.

**Data Collection**

Two data gathering instruments were used for this research. One data source was observations of the teacher librarian interacting with students and faculty during a flexible schedule day in the form of field notes (see Appendix A). Creswell (2008) states that observation is “the process of gathering open-ended, firsthand information by observing people and places at a research site” (p. 221). He continues to explain that there are advantages and disadvantages to observation fieldwork. First, advantages include recording information as it occurs at the setting, studying actual behavior, and studying individuals who may not be able to verbalize their ideas in an easy manner. Secondly, Creswell believes that some disadvantages to observations are the inability to listen carefully and pay attention to detailed visuals, and that the researcher is limited to the site that was selected, making it hard to create rapport with the individuals involved in the study.

Another data source used was interviews with the teacher librarian, the school’s principal, and two classroom teachers (one from grade three and one from grade five). The interviews consisted of questions dealing with the subjects’ viewpoints on the flexible schedule as well as their thoughts on the effectiveness flexible scheduling had on student achievement in the content areas and information literacy skills. Appendix B is a list of the interview questions. Creswell (2008) describes a qualitative interview as an opportunity for a “researcher [to] ask a few individuals general, open-ended questions
and record their answers” (p. 225). Open-ended questions allowed the participants to voice experiences without any limitations. Interviewing, like observations, has some advantages and disadvantages. Creswell explains one advantage for using interviews is that it allows the researcher better control over the type of information obtained because specific questions can be designed to elicit certain responses. One disadvantage to interviews is that the data collected may be “deceptive and provide perspectives the interviewee wants the researcher to hear” (p. 226).

**Data Analysis**

Creswell (2008) states that it is necessary to organize the collected data so it can be analyzed. One way to organize the data is coding which is “the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data” (p. 251). The data gathered by this researcher was analyzed by reviewing field notes and placing observations in a chart that records the grade levels with which the teacher librarian collaborated, the length of the meetings, whether the meetings were planned or informal, and who initiated the meetings. The interviews recorded by this researcher were also coded with specific themes related to flexible scheduling, the principal’s role in the implementation of flexible scheduling, and viewpoints on how effective this method of scheduling has on the academic success of elementary students.
The researcher conducted a qualitative case study by observing and interviewing a teacher librarian, principal, and classroom teachers in an elementary school in a suburban district in Iowa (School A). The researcher analyzed the data collected in interviews given to School A’s teacher librarian, principal, and classroom teachers who participate in flexible scheduling in the library (See Table 1 for demographics of interviewees). The framework for observation field notes is provided in Appendix A.

A table was created for each theme of the interview to report the teaching position of each interviewee and their viewpoint to show their stance on the idea of the flexible scheduling in the school library.

Table 1
Demographics of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Grade taught</th>
<th>Number of years in the district</th>
<th>Number of years experience with flexible scheduling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher librarian A</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>11-13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>21 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expectations for Flexible Scheduling

All faculty members that were interviewed discussed co-teaching as a central expectation for flexible scheduling. The teacher librarian expanded on the idea of co-teaching as a way to take some of the time burden off of the teachers’ shoulders by helping to plan units of study, “My main goal is to make their job easier.” Teacher B also expressed, “Classroom teachers have the opportunity to use the flexible scheduling to
benefit their teaching needs.” She went on to comment that if there was not a flexible schedule, there would be a disconnect between what was being taught in the classroom and the library lesson that would coincide.

There is a district requirement that states all third through fifth grade classes must visit the library for a minimum of 180 minutes per quarter. Principal A expects that all of the classroom teachers arrange times to meet with the teacher librarian as they see the need to integrate library skills. The principal reported that some of the teachers do a great job of integrating their classroom curriculum with the information literacy curriculum of the teacher librarian, but others do not. “Teachers don’t always think of the teacher librarians as someone to work with on content SBOs [standards, benchmarks and objectives].” The teacher librarian took it upon herself to get the classroom teachers in the library more than the stated district requirement. As the principal had stated earlier, the teacher librarian found it difficult to get all teachers in due to scheduling issues and conflicts. Through observations, the researcher found the fifth grade teachers planning with the teacher librarian in a collaborative unit on historical fiction. Classroom teachers needed the teacher librarian to share with students how to use AEA’s databases as well as Destiny’s WebPath Express. Table 2 summarizes the viewpoints of each faculty member interviewed and their perspective on the expectations for flexible scheduling.
Table 2  
*Views of Educators on the Expectations for Flexible Scheduling*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Teaching Position</th>
<th>Viewpoint</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectations for Flexible Scheduling</td>
<td>Teacher librarian A</td>
<td>District set minimum of 180 minutes a quarter for 3-5 grade to be in library. Take library curriculum and integrate in to classroom content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td></td>
<td>As teachers see the need to integrate library skills, they arrange times to meet with the TL. District sets a number of minutes that each class needs to meet in the library. “Teachers don’t always think of the TL as someone to work with on content SBOs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td></td>
<td>Co-teach skills needed to be independent in finding library materials as well as co-teaching the standards and benchmarks that coincide with library skills, for example researching skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Classroom teachers have the opportunity to use the flexible scheduling to benefit their teaching needs.” Teachers can utilize the open spots for teaching across areas, such as a media lesson in science one week and literacy the next. “Teachers collaborate with the TL to determine what lessons and resources can be taught in the media center. We then co-teach the lesson.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Need for Planning Time

Two perspectives of this research question arose during the interviews. The first interpretation was that because teachers in grades three through five were expected to co-teach with the teacher librarian, they would be missing out on a plan time that would otherwise have been covered during a set scheduled specials time. Teacher A has only experienced flexible scheduling for a couple of years. Previously, Teacher A was a kindergarten teacher with a fixed schedule for library instruction. Though she was not sure how the district accommodated teachers for the lack of planning time, she assumed that those teachers would be upset, “...but that hasn’t been the case. If anything, [the] three through five teachers seem to appreciate the extra help flexible scheduling can offer their students.” Principal A noted that he has not been approached by any teacher regarding a lack of planning time that the flexible scheduling may have caused.

With the district expectation that all third through fifth grade classes must meet with the teacher librarian for a minimum of 180 minutes a quarter for integrated lessons, a need for a collaborative planning time arose. All interviewed faculty stated that the best place for planning time between classroom teachers and the teacher librarian came before or after school, with an occasional opportunity for the teacher librarian to meet with grade level PLCs (Professional Learning Community). Teacher librarian A noted that at the beginning of the implementation of flexible scheduling into the district, the district curriculum coordinator had allotted a set time for each grade level to meet with the teacher librarian:

We had a day to meet, once a month with each grade level. For example, the first Monday I would meet with third grade, the first Tuesday I would meet with
fourth, and the first Wednesday I would meet with fifth. That way they brought
down their curriculum and I would bring my curriculum, and we would sit down
and look at different things we could work on together.

Currently, her new principal has not required a set time for the classroom teachers
and her to meet. She reported that catching teachers before school or through email have
been her best ways to set lessons into motion. Principal A and the classroom teachers
thought that meeting during PLC times would be best, although time is short during those
times, so meeting before school, during lunch times or other unscheduled times during
the day were the best times to get the collaboration process started. Table 3a summarizes
the viewpoints of each faculty member interviewed and their perspective on the need for
a planning time. Table 3b summarizes what was observed on how the teacher librarian
found time to collaborate with each of the grades third through fifth. School A’s teacher
librarian found it more successful in meeting face to face with each teacher.
Table 3a

Views of Educators on the Need for a Planning Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Teaching Position</th>
<th>Viewpoint</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for a Planning Time</td>
<td>Teacher librarian A</td>
<td>“In the past, we had a day to meet, once a month with each grade level to discuss curriculum correlations and how to integrate.” Email or talk back and forth about the points they wanted to hit during curriculum.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>No accommodations for a “missed” planning time since working with TL. No teacher has come to him about that. Teachers probably plan with TL during PLC time or before or after school.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Flexible scheduling was introduced while she was a kindergarten teacher in the district. “Flexible scheduling has only been used 3-5 and k-2 students have always had a scheduled time in the library, so I’m not aware how the district implemented flexible scheduling. You would think that 3-5 teachers might complain at having less planning time than k-2 because of the scheduling, but that has never been the case.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>“We can always meet before or after school and during PLC times.” TL is flexible with her schedule and depending on the day, can meet during lunch and other unscheduled times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3b

*Observations for Collaborative Planning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Planning through email</th>
<th>Planning face to face, before or after school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collaborating to Integrate Information Literacy and Content Area Standards

Since there is no set planning time for the classroom teachers and teacher librarian to meet, collaborating tended to be a little creative. Teacher librarian A explained that she took different approaches with each teacher. They teach the same objectives, but the activity may be different. “Each teacher knows how their classroom works well, better than I do...as long as everyone is flexible. That is the key!” The teachers who were interviewed noted that the initiation for collaborating is a two-way street. The teacher librarian goes to the classroom teachers with a library standard and asks for ideas on how to incorporate those into the content areas, and the classroom teachers take their standards and ask for input from the teacher librarian.

Principal A knew how important integrating information literacy and content area standards were to the success of students, but he stated that the district is in a position of curricular change right now and is not sure how the integration is going to look in the future. With the onset of Iowa Common Core, language arts and social studies standards, benchmarks, and objectives are being revamped to correlate to the new Common Core. He spoke highly of the teacher librarian’s attempt to collaborate with all classroom teachers, “Our teacher librarian does everything she can to promote the integration of information literacy into content areas, but you still need that teacher ‘bite’ to take the initiative to work with the teacher librarian.” Table 4 summarizes the viewpoints of each faculty member interviewed and their perspective on how teacher librarians and classroom teachers collaborate to integrate information literacy skills and content area standards.
Table 4

*View of Educators on Collaborating to Integrate Information Literacy and Content Area Standards*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Teaching Position</th>
<th>Viewpoint</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating to Integrate Information Literacy and Content Area Standards</td>
<td>Teacher librarian A</td>
<td>Different approaches with different teachers. “They know how their classroom works better than I do.” Open to new ideas and activities. “As long as everyone is flexible… flexibility is key!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>LA is changing due to Common Core. SS is working on changing the SBOs. “Our teacher librarian does everything she can to promote the integration of Information Literacy into content areas, but you still need that teacher ‘bite’ to take the initiative to work with the teacher librarian.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>“We meet before or after school and during our common planning times.” Lessons have been initiated both directions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>“We collaborate through one-on-one conversations and our PLC and building goal work.” “There are many standards and benchmarks we teach in fifth grade that lend themselves nicely to media center lessons.”</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Effectiveness of Collaboration in Improving Student Learning**

Without a supportive administration, collaboration between the classroom teachers and the teacher librarian was not effective. At the beginning of the implementation, Teacher librarian A described how the district curriculum director stood behind the research-based idea of flexible scheduling as well as the district’s motto: “Do what is best for the students!”:

> At the time [of implementation], third, fourth, and fifth wanted a planning time because of all the things they had to teach. So our curriculum director counted up kindergarten through fifth grade minutes they had for planning. Even with having third, fourth, and fifth grade coming to library on a fixed schedule, they still had more planning time than kindergarten through second grade. So, the director came back and shared that the third through fifth grade teachers still had more free time, so that argument was not valid. The district curriculum director continued to stand behind the district motto: “We are doing what is best for the kids.”

As the years went on, the collaboration got better and better. Currently, teacher librarian A focuses on promoting the positives of collaboration in hopes that more of the teachers will feel comfortable in letting her work with them on their unit lessons.

The teachers who were interviewed noted that students were able to apply learning in different settings in the school. They believed that collaboratively teaching with the teacher librarian was highly effective for student learning because “two heads are better than one” in brainstorming and working with students. Teacher A commented on a project she completed with the help of the TL:

> When working on paragraph writing with third grade students, it was difficult to meet with each individual student who was having a hard time getting started. I approached our teacher librarian and asked for her help. She agreed to help and set up a time for our class to come in for a refresher lesson on paragraph writing. We then had time to walk around and help those who still needed guidance.
Having two adults working with students was more effective than me just working on my own in the classroom.

Principal A wished he had hard data to base how effective collaboration was in the success of the students. However, there were no current data that he could share with the researcher, but he did mention that a big success indicator would be on the relationship between the teacher librarian and the classroom teacher, “The better the relationship is between the teacher and teacher librarian, the more it has to benefit the students.” Table 5 summarizes the viewpoints of each faculty member interviewed and their perspective on how effective collaboration is to improving student learning.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Teaching Position</th>
<th>Viewpoint</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of Collaboration in Improving Student Learning</td>
<td>Teacher librarian A</td>
<td>First year of implementation was rough. Set by district curriculum coordinator who read lots of books and research. Should make it easier on their life... TL gathers materials for lessons. Always tries to point out the positives.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>No data to say if it is effective. Comes down to the relationship between TL and classroom teacher.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>“The motto ‘two heads are better than one’ comes to mind when answering this question! When collaborating there are two minds to give ideas and two teachers to work with students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Students are able to learn the skills in a different setting and use books and literature in the library to aid in their learning. Going to the media center and searching for resources is a hands-on experience for the students. Collaboration in the media center is highly effective for both students and teachers.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Success of Flexible Schedule Implementation

Without standardized testing on information literacy standards (this suburban Iowa district is not required to take or report out the Reference section of the ITBS), the interviewed faculty based the success of the implementation of flexible scheduling on two things: administrative support and student success on individual projects.

Supportive administration was a key reason for the success of the flexible schedule in this district. Teacher librarian A explained that the administrator had documentation, reports, and research that she had read and what it showed. No matter how much the teachers complained about the change, she was able to back up her stand with those reports.

The motto for this district was: “Do what is best for the students!” Observing student projects that included the collaboration between teacher librarian and classroom teacher, the teachers and principal were able to measure its degree of success. Teacher A noted how using the teacher librarian in lesson planning allowed for students to individualize their research questions and that “the daunting task of research and writing became very easy to tackle because there were two teachers to plan, model and assist students.” Table 6 summarizes the viewpoints of each faculty member interviewed and their perspective on what factors they base the success for flexible scheduling.
### View of Educators on the Success of Flexible Schedule Implementation

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Teaching Position</th>
<th>Viewpoint</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success of Flexible Schedule Implementation</td>
<td>Teacher librarian A</td>
<td>Administrator that would not back down and stuck to her research. Administrative support and not back down from teacher complaining.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>No hard data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher librarian provides him with each class and the time they spend in the library. Satisfaction between teachers and success of students in their projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>“This year the 3rd graders did a research project as part of our social studies curriculum. The librarian collaborated with the teachers to introduce how research can be collected and then how to turn that information into a paragraph. With her help, each student’s research questions were individualized. The daunting task of research and writing became very easy to tackle because there were two teachers to plan, model and assist students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>If students meet the objectives that were established at the beginning of the unit. The collaborating teachers [classroom teacher and teacher librarian] reflect on how well the students did in meeting the objectives.</td>
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</table>
Summary

Through observations and interviews, the researcher found many important factors that contributed to the success of flexible scheduling in School A. First, co-teaching between the classroom teacher and the teacher librarian is a central expectation throughout the district. Without this expectation there would be a disconnect between what is taught in the classroom and what skills are learned in the library. Second, the district has a requirement that all third, fourth and fifth grade classes must visit the library for a minimum of 180 minutes per quarter. This time requirement, as well as the district motto, “Do what is best for the students!”, helped to promote the positive aspects of flexible scheduling instead of the focus of losing a plan time. Furthermore, flexibility among the classroom teachers and teacher librarians when finding time to plan, also contributed to the success of the flexible scheduling in School A. Since there was no set time for these colleagues to meet, they made time before or after school or used email to communicate back and forth about possible unit collaborations. Even though there was no data to support the effectiveness of the flexible schedule, the stakeholders of School A look to administrative support as well as the effectiveness to co-teach the set objectives of a particular unit.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Problem

Adopting flexible library scheduling in Iowa elementary schools may have implications for the integration of the library curriculum with other content area student learning goals. This study sought to explore the use of flexible scheduling in an elementary school in a suburban district in Iowa and how successful it was in enhancing collaborative relationships.

Conclusions

The researcher found that the implementation of flexible scheduling in this school district has been successful in creating opportunities for classroom teachers and the teacher librarian to collaborate and integrate curriculum. Although there was no specific day or time set aside for these colleagues to plan together, many were willing to find time in their day to work together. The idea of flexible scheduling was accepted by most classroom teachers in grades three through five. During the interviews with four faculty members of the school, the following issues were explored: (1) the expectations for flexible scheduling; (2) the need for a planning time; (3) collaborating to integrate information literacy and content area standards; (4) the effectiveness of collaboration in improving student learning; and (5) the success of flexible scheduling implementation.

The relationship between flexible scheduling and the success of student learning depends largely on the active support from administration as well as positive relationships between the classroom teachers and the teacher librarian. One goal of a
teacher librarian is to find new ways to promote how he/she can help the classroom
teacher teach the standards and benchmarks in content areas like language arts, science,
and social studies. To aid in the success of flexible scheduling, a teacher librarian needs
to also be willing to meet with teachers before or after school, through email, and through
profession learning communities. Though there is no documented data (i.e. standardized
test scores) to support success of the implementation of a flexible schedule, the faculty
members of this particular school found success to be attached to the ability of students
meeting required content area objectives.

One aspect that sets this study apart from others is the fact that the classroom
teachers had no complaints about losing planning time due to the use of flexible
scheduling. This researcher speculates that this attitude may be linked to the fact that
each grade level had a required amount of time required in the library. The researcher
also speculates that the district's motto, "Do what is best for the students," also had an
impact on the way classroom teachers viewed collaborating with the teacher librarian. It
was not a loss of planning time, but a time for two professionals to teach the student
population together.

Recommendations

This study relied on interviews from four faculty members in one suburban
elementary school in Iowa. For future studies, a researcher may choose to interview
more educators or students who have been exposed to flexible scheduling in their work at
school. Another possibility to further research on this topic would be to explore evidence
of the application of learning from the teacher librarian. Flexible scheduling is to aid in
making the learning from the teacher librarian applicable in real context. Is there some way to look for this evidence in student work? A third future study opportunity could be to widen the selection to include more than one school, perhaps even other districts throughout the United States. Do other districts have different expectations for flexible scheduling in their elementary schools? How do those schools accommodate collaborative planning between classroom teachers and teacher librarians?
REFERENCES


van Deusen, J. D., & Tallman, J. I. (1994). 1993 AASL research grant award interim report: Scheduling impact on curriculum involvement and information skills
## APPENDIX A

FIELD NOTES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Observations</th>
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APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Teacher Librarian

1. What are your expectations for flexible scheduling in the library?

2. How did the principal support teachers’ needs for planning time when they moved to a flexible library schedule?

3. How did you integrate information literacy skills with the content area standards and benchmarks?

4. How receptive were teachers to the change to flexible scheduling?

5. On what do you base the success of the implementation of flexible scheduling?

Principal

1. What are your expectations for a flexible schedule in the library?

2. How do you accommodate teachers' needs for planning time?

3. How does your teacher librarian integrate information literacy skills with the content area standards and benchmarks?

4. How effective is the collaboration in improving student learning in content areas (literacy, science, social studies) as well as information literacy?

5. On what do you base the success of the implementation of flexible scheduling?
Classroom Teachers

1. What are your expectations for flexible scheduling in the library?

2. How did the district accommodate your needs for planning time when they moved to a flexible library schedule?

3. How do you collaborate with the teacher librarian in order to integrate information literacy skills with the content area standards and benchmarks?

4. How effective is the collaboration in improving student learning in content areas (literacy, science, social studies)?

5. On what do you base the success of the implementation of flexible scheduling?