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Misconceptions of the Teacher Librarian Role

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Abstract

The problem identified in this study was the difference in perceptions among what teacher librarians perceive their role to be and what expectations they felt principals and classroom teachers had of them. The purpose of this study was to determine why such dissonance exists between how teacher librarians perceive their own role and how administrators and teachers perceive the role of the teacher librarian.

A survey utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data was conducted to determine what the expectations were of the teacher librarian role and library support staff in school libraries. The survey was sent to 93 K-12 teacher librarians in one regional center in Iowa; 33 responded for a 35.5% response rate. Qualitative analysis allowed the researcher to determine the reasons behind the tasks the teacher librarians actually were performing and how they felt administrators and classroom teachers perceived them. Quantitative data analysis allowed the researcher to tally the results and determine actual percentages of the tasks teacher librarians determined their role to be and also the percentages of the tasks they felt administrators and teachers expected of them.

The results determined that the majority of the tasks expected from principals and classroom teachers for the teacher librarian were professional tasks. Library support staff was found to be performing duties typical of the role. However, it was also determined that there also exists some expectations of teacher librarians that are non-professional in nature, and a small percentage, 11.5%, indicated that their principal had little or no expectations of them. Further, it was concluded that some of the principals did not fully understand the teacher librarian role. While there are many teacher librarians who are collaborating and performing professional duties, there is still exists a difference in expectations in many school libraries

MISCONCEPTIONS OF THE TEACHER LIBRARIAN ROLE

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
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by
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ABSTRACT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	vii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement	1
Purpose	4
Research Questions	5
Assumptions	5
Definitions	5
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Principal and Teacher Perceptions	6
Characteristics and Dispositions of School Librarians	11
Summary	14
Deficiencies	16
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY	17
Research Design	17
Procedure	18
Limitations	19
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS	21
Teacher Librarian Role	21
Library Support Role	22
Principal Expectations	23
Teacher Expectations	25
Collaboration	27
Librarian Demographics	29
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION	30
Recommendations	32
Future Studies	32
REFERENCES	33
APPENDIX A: TEACHER LIBRARIAN PERCEPTIONS SURVEY	35
APPENDIX B: INTRODUCTORY EMAIL	38
APPENDIX C: TEACHER LIBRARIAN SURVEY EMAIL	39

APPENDIX D: UNI INFORMED CONSENT40

APPENDIX E: THANK YOU/REMINDER EMAIL42

APPENDIX F: TEACHER LIBRARIAN AND SUPPORT STAFF
TASK/ROLE.....43

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1 Teacher Librarian Task by District Size	22
2 Library Support Staff Tasks by District Size	23
3 Principal Expectations by District Size.....	25
4 Teacher Expectations by District Size.....	27
5 Collaboration between Teacher Librarians and Staff by District Size.....	28
6 Length of Experience as a teacher Librarian.....	29
7 Teacher Librarian Library Level and Number of Buildings Worked in.....	29

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is 9 a.m. and the teacher librarian is sitting next to a group of students at the computers. She is helping them search for information on websites for a class assignment. She then moves to help another student search the library catalog for books of interest to him. This student is a challenged reader and finding materials of interest at his level is difficult, but the teacher librarian is able to achieve this. The afternoon finds the teacher librarian moving from classroom to classroom offering assistance with technology and project-based learning. She notices students struggling with copyright laws and citation issues and is able to instruct these students. By late in the school day, she is back at her desk seeking new resources to enhance a well-developed collection that fits the needs of the school curriculum. She is able to work closely with administrators to provide an active role in the curriculum taught in the building.

This scenario is a mere fantasy for many teacher librarians today. Many are so limited by schedules requiring them to cover multiple buildings that collaboration and providing library instruction is difficult. Time to meet with students and teachers to assist in research projects is limited. The opportunity to look for books that the challenged reader in 10th grade not only can read, but also is interested in, is rare.

Problem Statement

There seems to be dissonance among the perceptions of administrators and teachers for the role of the teacher librarian and the actual role. Often the teacher librarian is seen as merely the book lady who simply checks out books to students. Staffing of teacher librarians often precludes their availability in a single building over a

school week. This situation makes collaboration with classroom teachers, library instruction, curriculum support, and maintaining a solid collection tied to curriculum and student interest difficult at best.

The *2010 School Library Survey* from the Iowa Department of Education (2011) confirms that in school libraries with enrollments of 599 students or less, over half of the time a teacher librarian was not available full-time in a single building. Staffing levels decline alarmingly as the school enrollments decline. When enrollment drops below 399 students, more than 75% of the time there is not a full-time teacher librarian on staff in a single building. According to the Iowa School Library Survey from 2010, support staff is available at least 45 hours per week in all enrollment categories. This suggests that a library support staff person is frequently managing checkouts. However, support staff members are not trained teachers and cannot provide the professional library instruction in place of a teacher librarian.

Collaboration with classroom teachers also is kept to a minimum amount of hours according to this *2010 School Library Survey*. In libraries with enrollment numbers at 599 students or fewer, more than 75% of teacher librarians spend four hours per week or less in collaboration with classroom teachers planning instructional units and resources. Providing information literacy instruction is rated at six hours or less per week in enrollments of the same size. The *Iowa School Library Guidelines* (Iowa Department of Education, 2007) state best practice for a teacher librarian as, “The teacher librarian works with classroom teachers to design authentic assignments that allow students to create new knowledge and develop life-long learning skills. At least one full-time qualified teacher librarian serves each attendance center in the district” (p. 8). The Iowa

Guidelines also state for best practice, “The teacher librarian’s schedule is fully flexible so that she/he can meet with teachers and classes whenever needed” (p. 8). The *Iowa Department of Education Survey* reveals that this is not happening in over half of the Iowa school libraries. Teacher librarians may not be able to provide curricular, information literacy, or technology support if they do not have a flexible, full-time schedule in one library. The survey evidences that many teacher librarians work in multiple buildings. Many teacher librarians have fixed schedules and cover study halls in their buildings. The American Library Association states, “The mission of the school library program is to ensure that students and staff are effective users of information. The school librarian empowers students to be critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information by collaborating with educators and students to design and teach engaging learning experiences that meet individual needs” (AASL, 2009, p. 8). This collaboration remains difficult in many of today’s libraries as teacher librarians are shared among multiple buildings and assigned non-library duties.

In a research study set in a rural Iowa school, Krueger (2009) confirmed dissonance between how administrators and teachers perceive the role of the teacher librarian. The school district studied had been without a teacher librarian for five years at the date of the study. Eight teachers, four administrators, and one non-endorsed library associate were engaged in interviews and a focus group. One conclusion from the data was, “Participants had little understanding of the professional roles and functions of teacher-librarians, and they often confused library associates for professionals” (p. 5). Most of the teachers could not describe the role of the teacher librarian. Only two teachers and two administrators understood the teacher librarian role, but also felt that the

non-endorsed associate could assume these duties. This study confirmed the misconceptions that occur in many school libraries today in regards to the teacher librarian's role.

A quality school library program can have positive effects on student learning, according to a study done in Idaho by Lance, Rodney, and Schwarz (2010). This study of 176 principals and administrators concluded that when a strong school library program is in place, student achievement increases. The study found more than half of the participants valued the importance of the library program and flexible library access for instructional needs. Of the participants surveyed, 38.5% valued regular meetings with teacher librarians and principals. Collaborating with classroom teachers was seen as important in 29.9% of those surveyed. Of those administrators who valued teacher librarian and classroom teacher collaboration, "they were twice as likely to rate as excellent or good the teacher of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) literacy and social responsibility. They were also more than half again as likely to rate the teaching of independent learning highly" (pp. 15-16). This study confirmed the value that a quality school library program can have within the school district. However, a lack of understanding of the teacher librarian's role still exists in the majority of the school districts.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine why such dissonance exists between how teacher librarians perceive their own role and how administrators and teachers perceive the role of the teacher librarian.

Research Questions

1. How do administrators and teachers distinguish between the role of the teacher librarian and library support staff?
2. What are the reasons for the confusion between roles of teacher librarians and support staff roles?

Assumption

Administrators do not fully understand what the teacher librarian is trained to do. Because no clear role is defined, serving the needs of the students falls upon the support staff and the teacher librarian equally.

Definition

Support staff-“Support staff is provided to assist the teacher librarian in providing comprehensive service. They are well trained, and function independently in support of the library program. Support staff is available to circulate books and assist students” (Iowa Department of Education, 2007, p. 14).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various studies over time have reported misconceptions in how the teacher librarian's role is perceived. Administrators, principals, and teachers often do not utilize the expertise of the teacher librarian fully, due perhaps to a lack of knowledge or understanding. It is essential for administration and staff to fully understand the teacher librarian's knowledge and training to utilize this expertise to the fullest. In order for this to happen, the reasons behind the lack of knowledge and understanding need to be examined.

Principal and Teacher Perceptions

Shannon (2012) examined administrators' perspectives of teacher librarians in school library programs with strong administrator support. Shannon used a Qualtrics online survey to question 96 administrators selected from a sampling of submissions from AASL Assembly delegates and AASL members. Of the 96, 30 responded to the survey, while 27 completed it. This sampling was selected to gain perspectives from administrators who placed a strong value on the school library program. Shannon surveyed the administrators to discover how they gained their strong knowledge of the school library program, what aspects they felt were important, and what recommendations they had for school library programs and administrators. Shannon determined that the majority gained their knowledge of the school library program working with the school librarian. Only five out of the thirty respondents reported learning of the school librarian program through administrator training. When asked how important it is for administrators to have knowledge of the school library program

included in their administrative training, 80% agreed it was very important. Shannon concluded that it is important for a strong library program to have the support of administrators and principals. When administrators and principals perceive the teacher librarian as a vital part of the education system, the teacher librarian is able to be a strong instructional leader and provide collaboration with classroom teachers.

Shannon's earlier study from 2009 concluded that principal support of the school library program is "critical to its success" (p. 1). Shannon's study used an online survey to gather information from 785 principals in South Carolina. The respondents were asked what their criteria were for hiring teacher librarians and what competencies they felt were the most important. Over 24% of the principals surveyed responded. The top three criteria found to be most important were: interpersonal, knowledge and skills, and pre-employment qualifiers. The principals wanted teacher librarians who possessed strong people skills and who were willing to work with others. Being organized, knowledge of the skills for the job, and being current on media resources, fell within these top three criteria levels. It was also important for the principals to have the right person for the job, so recommendations and experience was felt to be important. The competencies that ranked highest on the survey were those that involved teaching and learning, while those competencies that involved collaborative planning and curriculum did not rank as high. Overall, the principals who responded were satisfied with their teacher librarian. However, 17% felt dissatisfied with the work of their current teacher librarian. These principals felt that more needed to be done in the areas of library appearance, organization, and also the teacher librarian's interpersonal skills. While most did remain satisfied with the teacher librarian and the library program, the principals surveyed did

not see leadership and curriculum development as high competencies for a teacher librarian to possess. “If the principal does not demonstrate an understanding of the potential of the library program on student learning, the school librarian must be proactive in showing him or her how the library program supports school goals and impacts student achievement” (p. 19).

Francis and Lance (2011) reported findings from two studies done in Colorado and Idaho to determine administrators’ and teachers’ perceptions for the role of the teacher librarian and student learning. The Colorado study utilized data from the Library Research Service’s 2007-2008 annual survey of school libraries and the 2008 Colorado Department of Education’s CSAP (Colorado Student Assessment Program) scores. The findings showed a significant difference in reading scores when more library staffing was in place. The reading scores were higher in schools where there was an increase in library staffing. This study further concluded that strong library programs have teacher librarians who were “more confident in their teaching abilities than paraprofessional library staff” (p. 65). This confidence was attributed to administrator and teacher support and collaboration, and also inclusion in curriculum and staff development.

Alexander, Smith, and Carey (2008) surveyed 102 elementary, middle, and high school principals in Kentucky to determine if the principals’ value they placed on the school library program had changed in the past ten years from the last study done. This survey was conducted utilizing thirty-five objective questions, along with demographic questions, that were mailed to the participants. The first significant finding determined that principals with formal training concerning the school library program rated the importance of the program at a 7 on a 10-point scale, versus 4.97 with those principals

who had no training. When asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, the importance of the school library program, the average high score was only 3.3. Overall, high school and middle school principals rated the value of the school library program higher than elementary school principals. Alexander's study confirmed that with formal administrative training in the school library program, administrators deemed the program as important. However, less than 10 percent of those responding had any formal training. The findings of the study concluded that after ten years, the value principals see in the school library program is still in need of improvement. Principals who see the value of a strong library program tended to have a solid working relationship with the teacher librarian and/or formal training.

Church (2010) utilized a 34-question online survey of 108 high school principals in Virginia school districts to determine principal perceptions of the school library program and the teacher librarian as an instructional leader. The findings concluded that 96% of the principals agree that teacher librarians should "collaborate with teachers to teach information literacy skills in the context of the content curriculum" (p. 7). Yet, only 65% agree that the teacher librarian should collaborate to evaluate student work. In regards to principal support of the teacher librarian in an instructional role, 66% support this role; however, the majority felt the teacher librarian needed to implement this. The study determined that principals perceived the teacher librarian as an instructional leader, providing support and collaboration to classroom teachers and playing an active role in staff development. However, the teacher librarian needs to be a strong advocate for the school library program.

An earlier study by Church (2008) was conducted to determine the perceptions of

the school library program by 110 elementary school principals from Virginia. The online survey used a 5-point scale to rate questions on the instructional role of the teacher librarian and their perceptions of the teacher librarian. The majority of the respondents agreed on the importance of the teacher librarian in an instructional role. An open-ended question was also asked of the principals to relate an incident that led to their perceptions. The majority of the responses were positive, however negative answers were given. “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” (p. 11). Church’s elementary school study of principals reached the same conclusions as her study of high school administrators. Principals tended to see the value placed on a strong school library program and concluded that teacher librarians need to advocate for their profession.

O’Neal’s (2004) study surveyed 205 administrators, teachers, and media specialists in elementary, middle, and high schools in Atlanta, Georgia. The study was conducted to determine perceptions of the media specialist role. The findings concluded that administrators and teachers’ perceptions of the media specialist role differ from those of media specialists. Further findings indicated that teachers did not see the value of collaboration with school media specialists as instructional partners. More education is needed to change the perceptions of administrators and teachers.

Miller (2004) conducted a small-scale survey in Canada of five teachers who had taught five years or less to determine what perceptions these teachers had of the teacher

librarian and the school library program. She had hoped to gain an insight into what novice teachers knew of the teacher librarian role and what services they provide. She conducted a qualitative research study where she tape-recorded their answers to eight questions. The questions ranged from the respondents' experiences with a teacher librarian and their understanding of information literacy, to the teacher librarian and their instructional role. The findings resulted in the five respondents being unaware of the teacher librarian as a collaborative, teaching and instructional partner. The respondents had little knowledge of information literacy and viewed the teacher librarian as a support person, provider of resources, and a technology person. The findings were an indication that novice teachers are also unaware of the expertise and value of the teacher librarian and the school library program.

Characteristics and Dispositions of School Librarians

Bush and Jones (2010) used a qualitative method for their Delphi study on school librarians and dispositions. Participants in this study included members of school library journal boards, academic scholars, and association leaders for a total of 63 participants. Bush and Jones sought to identify the professional dispositions of school librarians. Within a two-month period, three rounds of responses were gathered from the participants. The first round sought to identify the five key professional dispositions of school librarians. Teaching, collaboration, leading, lifelong learning, and creative thinking were the top five. Round two asked for the participants to respond to the dispositions and rank order them. The respondents were not surprised to see teaching, collaboration, leading, lifelong learning, and creative thinking as the top five ranked dispositions. They felt the five dispositions fit well together and were consistent with

student learning. The final round in the study asked the participants to rank the dispositions from critically important to least important. Critical thinking and creative thinking ranked at the top and advocacy ranked at the bottom of the dispositions as least important. Bush and Jones' study was limited to leaders in the school library field and did not include novice school librarians or school administrators.

Callison (2007) reported on studies of the school library media specialist's instructional role and the value of the media specialist within the school system. He cited Lance, Rodney, and Hamilton-Pennell's 2005 study in Illinois compared student achievement scores to library variables. In schools with the highest achievement scores, school library media specialists were reported as spending 50% more time providing classroom materials, 240% more time in planning with classroom teachers, and 115% more time in providing in-service training. The findings from this Illinois study suggested that the characteristics of school library media specialists as leaders, program administrators, technology facilitators, and collaborative partners were important characteristics for the media specialist to possess. Further findings from Callison's report concluded that school library media specialists play an important role as an instructional leader.

Roys' (2004) study was conducted to determine what 26 high school administrators, 27 school library faculty members, and 142 Master of Library Science students deemed as important characteristics for the teacher librarian to possess. The study is relevant to conclude what qualities school administrators search for when hiring school library media specialists. Survey questions were emailed to the respondents to rate on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being of great importance, the top qualities for the teacher

librarian to possess. The top three qualities all of the three groups of respondents rated highly were: working well with others, strong technology skills, and strong managerial skills. Administrators did not rate as highly the school media specialist's teaching ability, school media endorsement, or MLS degree. "That is, one might surmise that administrators view the running of the school library media program as requiring primarily coordination, cooperation, recordkeeping, and housekeeping of the school library media center" (p. 9). It is further noted that administrators needed to gain a better understanding of the school library media specialist role.

Gwatney (2001) noted in her study of three elementary school media specialists that what they "were spending their time doing was not necessarily what they *actually* were doing" (p. 39). All three participants found they were actually spending more time in program administration and less time in teaching than they had originally thought. She used observation, interviews, and plan books to gather her data. The findings concluded that the average time spent on program administrative duties was 42.7% versus 23.6% of the time in a teacher role. The role of instructional partner was only 1.7% of their time and information specialist role was 16.3% of their time. Overall, each of the study participants reported being happy within their job position; however, they were spending a majority of time doing program administrative work. Gwatney further suggests that this overall job satisfaction may be due to the three participants being "unaware of what such roles require, or perhaps they were uninterested in concentrating on roles that received such a small portion of their time and attention" (p. 40).

Summary

Perceptions of the teacher librarian's role within the school system continue to differ among administrators, principals, and classroom teachers. Shannon (2012) found that the majority of school administrators felt that it is important to have formal training about school libraries included in their administrative training. However, most gain this knowledge from working directly with a teacher librarian. Shannon's 2009 study found that principal perceptions of the teacher librarian were related to interpersonal abilities and knowledge and organizational skills associated with the role. These principals' perceptions of the leadership role for teacher librarians in collaboration and curriculum planning were found to be weak. Alexander, Smith, and Carey's (2008) study confirmed that with formal administrative training in the school library program, administrators deemed the program as important. However, less than one in ten of those responding had any formal training whatsoever. Alexander's et al. study also found that middle and high school principals tended to value the teacher librarian higher than elementary principals. The study further concluded that administrators perceived the school library program as important when they tended to have a strong working relationship with the teacher librarian.

When strong administrator support of the school library program existed, reading scores increased, as Francis and Lance's (2011) Colorado study indicated. With strong administrator support and teacher collaboration, teacher librarians tended to be more confident in their teaching abilities. Thus, Francis and Lance's study supports the idea that when teacher librarians are perceived as being a vital part of the instructional team, student learning increases. Church's 2010 study also concluded that teacher librarians

should collaborate with classroom teachers, however a majority deemed it necessary that the teacher librarian instigate this. It also was concluded for the teacher librarian to be an advocate for the school library program. Church's (2008) earlier study reported negative responses by principals. Her findings reinforced the need to advocate and initiate the collaboration relationships.

Novice teachers also were found to be unaware of the teacher librarian and the value of collaboration and the impact a strong library program can have on student learning, according to Miller's 2004 study. This strengthens the notion that little formal training has been provided to teachers and administrators prior to working with the teacher librarian. Thus, the teacher librarian needs to advocate for the school library program. O'Neal's (2004) study further found that teachers did not see the need to collaborate with teacher librarians. These studies confirmed that administrators, principals, and teachers need more formal training into the value of the teacher librarian and a strong library program.

The characteristics and dispositions of teacher librarians found to be of importance were teaching, collaboration, leading, lifelong learning, and creative thinking, according to Bush and Jones' 2010 study of professionals and leaders in the school library field. Callison (2007) also concluded that these dispositions as leaders, and collaborative partners were important as well. When these dispositions were valued in a teacher librarian as an instructional leader, student achievement scores rose.

Discrepancies were found in Gwatney's 2001 study in regards to what the teacher librarians determined they spent their time doing and to what they actually were doing. Gwatney found that more time was spent on administrative duties than in the teacher role.

Gwatney surmised that this might be due to a lack of understanding of the teacher librarian roles.

Deficiencies

The research findings indicate that when administrators and principals value a strong school library program and the teacher librarian, student achievement increases. However, many still did not see the value of the school library program. Further, many teachers did not see the need to collaborate with teacher librarians with instructional units. The American Association of School Librarians' (2009) guideline states that the school librarian "collaborates with a core team of classroom teachers and specialists to design, implement, and evaluate inquiry lessons and units" (p. 20). The research studies found that more often, the collaboration needed to be implemented by the teacher librarian. A lack of formal training for the principals, administrators, and teachers in regards to the role of the teacher librarian tended to be a factor for this discrepancy.

Teacher librarians are often not being utilized to their fullest training and capabilities. When teacher librarians serve K-12 in multiple buildings, it is possible that administrators and teachers are confused as to the role of the teacher librarian and the role of support staff. Additional studies need to be done to determine what administrators, teachers, and teacher librarians perceive the teacher librarian role to be and why inaccurate perceptions persist in some settings.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Teacher librarians are trained to be leaders, information specialists, program administrators, and collaborative partners, yet many are not being used to their fullest potential. Working in multiple buildings may interfere with the teacher librarian's ability to assume these roles. Due to a lack of knowledge as to the roles of the teacher librarian, support staff may be assuming duties they are not trained to do. The purpose of this study was to determine why such dissonance exists between how teacher librarians perceive their own role and how administrators and teachers perceive the role of the teacher librarian.

Research Design

A survey research study was used to determine both numerical data and expectations concerning the perceptions of the teacher librarian role and the support staff role in school libraries. Wildemuth (2009) explains, "Survey research supports the collection of a variety of data, including the beliefs, opinions, attributes, and behaviors of the respondents" (p. 256). This study explored perceptions of teacher librarians and support staff within various school systems to determine if perceptions varied among groups who employed a full-time teacher librarian in each building and those groups who employed one teacher librarian between multiple buildings. Wildemuth states that survey research may investigate library scenarios such as worker satisfaction. This study explored the value placed on teacher librarians and thus the teacher librarian satisfaction in regards to the role within the school systems. School library programs fail when school administrators and teachers do not understand the teacher librarian role within the

school system.

Procedure

This study utilized a survey of all teacher librarians within the Area Education Agency 267 (AEA 267), which serves 57 public schools and 20 non-public schools in Iowa. Survey data was collected from the teacher librarians to determine their perceptions of how they are seen by teachers and administrators. Email addresses were obtained from AEA 267 and the link to the online survey was emailed through AEA267. Each participant was emailed a survey questionnaire (see Appendix A) and informed consent document (see Appendix D).

The questionnaire was brief with simple language. Complete, well-planned sentences were used. Participation was voluntary. The survey used both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The survey questionnaire consisted of an introduction section with questions to engage the participants and encourage participation. The second section consisted of questions essential to the research study. The final section had demographic and classification questions.

The researcher sought prior approval from the Institutional Research Board from the Office of Sponsored Programs, University of Northern Iowa. Approval was granted and the researcher emailed an introductory email informing the participants of the survey (see Appendix B). Two to three days later, the survey questionnaire with informed consent document (see Appendixes C and D) was emailed to the participants with a thank you and reminder email (see Appendix E) sent one week later.

Questionnaire responses were tallied using both quantitative content analysis and qualitative analysis. "Content analysis is interested only in content characteristics related

to the hypothesis or research question” (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 298). Content analysis allows for themes to emerge from the data collected. This method also allows the researcher to discover numerical data regarding tasks performed by teacher librarians and support staff and also numerical data in proportion to amount of time teacher librarians spend within a single building. Percentages were calculated for quantitative data.

Qualitative content analysis is “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 308). This method of data analysis allowed the researcher to discover misconceptions reported by participants in regard to teacher librarian roles. Responses to the survey data collection were coded (see Appendix F) and personal identifiers were removed. Responses were coded using tally marks. The researcher was open to new codes emerging from the study.

Limitations

A limitation to this survey is the fact that qualitative content analysis is interpretive. Open-ended questions require interpretations from the researcher. Survey research “involves extensive planning” (Wildemuth, 2009, p.256). The question design needs to be carefully planned with questions that are brief, simple to understand, and specific. Survey questions need to be pretested by experts in the content area for reliability and validity and pilot tested by a sampling of the target population. Pilot testing may further limit the number of participants from a small target survey population. Survey data collection does not allow for follow-up responses from the participants. The survey is further limited to teacher librarians in AEA 267 and how these teacher librarians feel administrators and teachers perceive them. The responses are

gained through the filter of the teacher librarian. Further limitations are the lack of more than one researcher to provide different perspectives on the question design and interpretation of responses.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

There seems to be a difference among the perceptions of administrators and teachers for the role of the teacher librarian. An understanding of what the teacher librarian's role is, and what he/she is qualified to do, is crucial to having a solid school library program. The purpose of this study was to determine why such dissonance exists between how teacher librarians perceive their own role and how administrators and teachers perceive the role of the teacher librarian.

The population of this study comprised solely of teacher librarians within the Area Education Agency 267 (AEA267). The AEA267 services 57 public school and 20 non-public school districts involving over 60,000 students in Iowa. The AEA267 region encompasses 18 counties and nearly 9,000 square miles. There are 94 teacher librarians within AEA267. The link to the online survey was sent to each librarian within the AEA267, with the exclusion of anyone within my district. Of the 93 remaining teacher librarians surveyed, 33 responded, making a 35.5% rate of return.

Teacher Librarian Role

What do teacher librarians perceive their role to be? Table 1 shows tasks teacher librarians reported they are actually performing. The data were broken down by district size to determine if a connection exists between district sizes and tasks the teacher librarians performed. The teacher librarians were asked to list five top tasks they perceived to be a teacher librarian task. Of the 175 total responses given, collection management, with 29 responses, or 16.6%, was listed as the top perceived task. Library instruction with 25 responses, or 14.3%, technology instruction and support at 24

responses, or 13.7%, and finally collaboration and library management at 17 responses each, or 9.7%, followed this. It was interesting to note that 8% still listed clerical and non-library duties as among their top five perceived tasks of the teacher librarian in response to the initial question. However, one respondent stated, “This is my reality, not what it should be” when listing four of the five tasks as being clerical. Interestingly, the largest school districts, with over 1000 enrollments, did not list professional development and staff instruction as one of the top five tasks performed. However, the remaining smaller districts all listed this as a top task they performed.

Table 1

Teacher Librarian Task by District Size

Task	1000+	600-999	500-599	400-499	Total Responses by Task
Professional Task:					
Collection	18	5	3	3	29
Collaboration	12	2	1	2	17
Curriculum	6	3	0	2	11
Reading	7	3	1	2	13
Technology	15	3	2	4	24
Library Instruction	17	3	3	2	25
Student Support	5	1	1	0	7
PD/Staff Support and Instruction	7	4	3	2	16
Library Management	11	5	1	0	17
District Goals/Committees/Community	1	1	1	0	3
Non-Professional Task:					
Clerical	10	0	2	0	12
Teacher Prep Time	0	0	0	0	0
Non-Library	1	1	0	0	2
Total Responses	110	30	18	17	175

Library Support Role

The teacher librarians surveyed were asked to list their top five tasks they perceived to be for library support staff. Table 2 shows the responses from the teacher

librarians surveyed as to their perception of library support staff tasks. Clerical was the top task perceived to be a library support staff task overall, with 47 responses out of 139 total, or 33.8%. Circulation was next with 30 responses, or 21.6%, followed by student support at 14 responses, or 10.1%, maintaining an attractive library with 11 responses, or 7.9%, and finally supervising students in the library was the fifth ranked response at 9 responses, or 6.5%. There was not a large difference in perception of library support tasks in comparison to district size. The results show that library support staff is performing tasks typical of the role, and not teacher librarian tasks.

Table 2

Library Support Tasks by District Size

Task	1000+	600-999	500-599	400-499	Total Responses by Task
Circulation	14	10	3	3	30
Reading	2	1	0	2	5
Technology	3	1	0	0	4
Staff Support	8	1	0	1	10
Student Support	9	3	1	1	14
Clerical	33	9	3	2	47
Assist TL	3	2	0	1	6
Library Supervision	4	2	2	1	9
Maintain attractive library and free access	7	2	0	2	11
Non-library	2	0	1	0	3
Total Responses	85	31	10	13	139

Principal Expectations

The teacher librarians surveyed were asked to list what expectations they felt their principals had from them, Table 3 shows the overall top response was library instruction at 18 responses, or 14.8%, followed closely by technology at 17 responses, or 13.9%.

Professional development and staff instruction and non-library duties were both ranked

third at 14 responses, and 11.5%. Some of the responses involving non-library duties were, "He would like me to use the library for large-group study halls" and "recess duty, cover classroom teachers... YOU HAVE TIME ON YOUR HANDS TO KILL undertones from admin. Because there isn't 100% face time with students coming through." There were also 4 respondents, or 3.3%, who reported their principal or administrator had no expectations laid out for them. "Be on time to complete the ICDP form, "Never hear from him or see him unless something's goofed up," and "Unfortunately, I don't think that some of my principals have any expectations-I'm just a piece of paper required by the State of Iowa." Another response was "He doesn't understand the library."

When comparing results by district size, the largest district ranked technology, library instruction, and library management as the top three perceived expectations from principals. The district size of 600-999 listed responses in only three of the categories. Non-library and no expectations tied for first ranking at three responses out of eight, or 37.5% each, and library instruction with two responses out of eight, or 25.0%. The top response for the district size of 500-599 was professional development and staff instruction and support at 3 out of the 11 responses, or 27.3%. The smallest district's results were spread out more evenly, with no great difference. The results, overall, show that teacher librarians understood principals to either expect little professional library duties, or have no expectations in 21 (17%) of the responses.

Table 3

Principal Expectations by District Size

Task	1000+	600-999	500-599	400-499	Total Responses by Task
Professional Task:					
Collection	8	0	2	2	12
Collaboration	7	0	1	1	9
Curriculum	4	0	0	0	4
Reading	1	0	0	1	2
Technology	16	0	0	1	17
Library Instruction	15	2	1	0	18
Student Support	6	0	0	1	7
PD/Staff Support and Instruction	10	0	3	1	14
Library Management	11	0	1	1	13
District Goals/Committees/Community	5	0	0	0	5
Non-Professional Task:					
Clerical	2	0	1	0	3
Teacher Prep Time	0	0	0	0	0
Non-Library	8	3	1	2	14
No expectations	0	3	1	0	4
Total Responses	93	8	11	10	122

Teacher Expectations

Teacher librarians were asked to list what expectations they felt classroom teachers had from them. The results are listed in Table 4 with 112 total responses. Technology, and professional development and staff support, both ranked first with 18 responses, or 16.1%. The second top ranked response from classroom teacher expectations was library instruction at 17 responses, or 15.2%. Finally, the teacher librarians surveyed listed collection and collaboration as third with 12 responses each, or 10.7%. When comparing the results by district size, collection management remained the top response from both the 600-999 and 500-599 enrollment size districts. All of the district sizes listed professional duties as their top three ranked expectations from

classroom teachers. These tasks were collection management, collaboration, reading, technology, and professional development and staff support. There were 5 respondents from the largest district size of over 1000 who listed non-library tasks as expectations from classroom teachers. Their responses were: “They expect me to relieve them of their classes 40 min. every 12 days.” “Supervise students they want out of their classrooms.” “To take their students to give them a break.” “Make sure everything is working and stay out of the way of ‘real’ teaching.” Although these responses may have indicated instructional expectations, the tone indicated that instruction was not valued so these were coded as non-library tasks. Overall, 15 out of the 112 responses, or 13.4%, were listed as being non-professional tasks that the teacher librarians felt classroom teachers expected from them.

Table 4

Teacher Expectations by District Size

Task	1000+	600-999	500-599	400-499	Total Responses by Task
Professional Task:					
Collection	5	4	2	1	12
Collaboration	7	3	0	2	12
Curriculum	0	0	0	0	0
Reading	5	3	0	0	8
Technology	14	3	0	1	18
Library Instruction	11	2	1	3	17
Student Support	5	2	1	2	10
PD/Staff Support and Instruction	13	3	1	1	18
Library Management	0	0	0	0	0
District Goals/Committees/Community	2	0	0	0	2
Non-Professional Task					
Clerical	1	0	1	0	2
Teacher Prep Time	3	2	0	0	5
Attractive Library Space	3	0	0	0	3
Non-Library	5	0	0	0	5
Total Responses	74	22	6	10	112

Collaboration

The final non-demographic question asked of the teacher librarians concerned their view on collaboration within their school building. The results are listed in Table 5. The overall top responses were minimal and ok with 9 out of the 33 respondents each, or 27.3%. The remaining respondents stated excellent, very good, and none at all equally.

When comparing the results by district size, the largest district of over 1000 enrollment listed ok or minimal as the top responses, while the next largest at 600-999 enrollment listed excellent tied with minimal as their responses of 2 out of the 6 respondents, or 33.3%. The district size of 500-599 listed ok at their top response

followed by very good. Finally, the smallest district size of 400-499, listed minimal with 2 out of the 3 respondents, or 66.7%, followed by ok with 1 response, or 33.3%.

Collaboration overall was listed as minimal or none at all with 14 out of the 33 respondents, or 42.4%, stating this. The responses given were of a wide range. “It is excellent! We work together from the conceptual point to the project to evaluation of the project and everything in between.” “Great!” “Ok. We don’t collaborate enough.” “I am not allowed to collaborate because of my schedule. This is VERY disappointing. I would love the opportunity to team teach...” “Non-existent.” “As well as can be expected since I have a fixed schedule and am teaching their kids when they have common planning time.” “The only collaboration is when I am asked to teach students ‘how to do technology’ like make a ‘power point.’” A pattern emerged from the responses in regards to collaboration being either minimal or non-existent and scheduling. When the teacher librarians reported collaboration being either minimal or none, a majority of the teacher librarians also reported having a fixed, or somewhat fixed schedule.

Table 5

Collaboration between Teacher Librarians and Staff by District Size

Rating	1000+	600-999	500-599	400-499	Overall Totals
Excellent	3	2	0	0	5
Very Good	3	1	1	0	5
Ok	6	0	2	1	9
Minimal	5	2	0	2	9
None at all	4	1	0	0	5
Total	21	6	3	3	33

Librarian Demographics

The length of time worked as a teacher librarian varied from 1 year to 39 years as reported in Table 6. There were 19 out of the 33 respondents with over five years experience, or 57.6%. Of the 33 respondents, 21, or 63.6%, listed they worked in only one library, while 12 worked in two or more libraries (see Table 7). One of the respondents reported working in seven libraries within three school districts. Ten worked in an elementary library, thirteen worked in a secondary library, and ten worked in a K-12 library.

Table 6

Length of Experience as a Teacher Librarian

Number Years	Number Respondents	Percent of Respondents
1	3	9.1
2-5	11	33.3
6-10	7	21.1
11-20	7	21.1
21-30	2	6.1
30-39	3	9.1

Table 7

Teacher Librarian Library Level and Number of Buildings Worked In

Library Level	1 Library	2 Libraries	3 Libraries	4+ Libraries
Elementary	9	1	0	0
Secondary	10	3	0	0
K-12	2	3	2	3
Totals	21	7	2	3

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Teacher librarians are trained to be leaders, information specialists, program administrators, and collaborative partners, yet many are not being used to their fullest potential. Working in multiple buildings and a lack of knowledge of the teacher librarian's abilities may be contributing factors. The purpose of this study was to determine why such dissonance exists between how teacher librarians perceive their role and how administrators and teachers perceive the role to be of the teacher librarian.

Some interesting findings were made through this study of teacher librarians within Area Education Agency 267 (AEA267). Not surprising was that teacher librarians perceived their tasks to be professional in nature with collection management, library instruction, and technology instruction and support, ranking highest. They also felt teachers perceived them as professional in nature, with technology instruction and support, library instruction, and collection and collaboration, having the highest rankings. However, teacher librarians did feel classroom teachers did not fully understand their role and qualifications in the districts with the largest enrollment of over 1000. These teacher librarians felt they were perceived to be prep time for the teachers, to perform clerical duties, and perform non-library tasks in 15 (13.4%) of the responses.

Another interesting finding is while teacher librarians listed collaboration as one of the top ranked tasks they perceived their role to be, their reality was quite different. The overall responses concerning what collaboration existed within their buildings was minimal, or none at all in over 42% of the responses; however 9 (27%) indicated collaboration was ok, and 10 (30%) said collaboration was excellent or very good.

What did teacher librarians feel were the expectations from principals? Most teacher librarians did feel their principals perceived their role to be professional in most cases, however, 17.2% of the responses were of non-library or no expectations at all. This suggests that many principals still do not fully understand the teacher librarian role. This also suggests that teacher librarians need to have conversations with their administrators to clarify the teacher librarian role. Teacher librarians need to advocate for themselves and their abilities, so they are more than “just a piece of paper for the State of Iowa,” as one respondent felt. The only difference to note in district size concerned the schools with enrollments of 600-999. These teacher librarians felt that non-library and non-professional tasks were the expectations from their principals.

This survey also sought to discover what roles library support staff were performing within the libraries. The survey revealed that library support staff were performing duties related to their job description. They were performing clerical duties, circulation, and providing support for students. Not one of the teacher librarians surveyed reported library support staff performing any teacher librarian professional duties.

The survey data suggest that one reason for the confusion between the roles of library support staff and teacher librarians may be the result of teacher librarians performing clerical duties when there is a lack of support staff. Teacher librarians need to have flexible schedules with support staff available to be able to perform duties such as professional development and support, committees, and district leadership roles, along with collaboration. Once teacher librarians are seen as leaders and instructional partners, then this dissonance will fade.

Recommendations

This survey entailed a small sampling of 33 teacher librarians who responded. It would be interesting to also survey principals and teachers to compare their perceptions to those of the teacher librarians in this survey. This researcher would change the wording concerning perceptions of the library support staff tasks to inquire what library support staff roles are actually being performed. Surveying actual library support staff would also be beneficial in learning what tasks they are performing. This researcher would also include a section for any additional comments to further gather qualitative data.

Future Studies

A future study in five years would be interesting to determine if technology is rated as the top task and expectations of the teacher librarian. With many school districts going 1:1 with technology, it would be intriguing to observe if this area has evolved with teacher librarians. Surveying principals and teachers as to what they determine the role of the teacher librarian to be would be useful to compare these results to what the teacher librarians in this study perceived from these groups. It is difficult to determine actual expectations without surveying the principal and teacher groups firsthand. Another informative study could be done to determine what formal training classroom teachers and principals have regarding teacher librarian qualifications in the school systems. Teacher librarians may need to advocate for their libraries and embrace every opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise. Then, they may be perceived as leaders, information specialists, teachers, and collaborative partners.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER LIBRARIAN PERCEPTIONS SURVEY

The purpose for this survey is to determine how teacher librarians feel administrators and teachers within their school system perceive them. Please respond based on your own experience. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and will pose no foreseeable risk. You may refuse to participate or withdraw your participation at any time during the survey. Your responses will be kept anonymous and confidential. Participation in this survey will indicate your understanding of this survey.

1. Please list 5 major tasks that you perceive to be a teacher librarian task or role.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

2. Please list 5 major tasks that you perceive to be a library support staff task or role.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

3. What are some examples of expectations that your principal has for you?

4. What are some examples of expectations that teachers have for you? _____
5. How do you view the collaboration between you and classroom teachers to be within the building? _____
6. How many teacher librarians does your district employ? _____
7. How many school libraries do you work in? _____
8. Which of the following pertains to your current employment as a teacher librarian?
1. Elementary teacher librarian _____
 2. Secondary teacher librarian _____
 3. K-12 teacher librarian _____
9. How many hours per week do you work in a single building? _____
10. Does your building have library support staff? _____
11. If your library employs library staff, are they full or part-time? _____
12. How long have you worked in your building? _____
13. How many years of experience do you have as a teacher librarian? _____
14. What is the size of your school district enrollment?
- a. _____ 1000 and over
 - b. _____ 600-999
 - c. _____ 500-599
 - d. _____ 400-499
 - e. _____ 300-399

f. _____ 200-299

g. _____ 199 and below

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

Subject Heading: Teacher Librarian Perception

My name is Mary Junker and I am a graduate student in the School Library Studies program at the University of Northern Iowa. As part of my final research project, I will be sending you a short survey through your email in a two to three days. I respectfully ask for your responses to this short survey within one week. Your privacy will be respected.

Thank you.

APPENDIX C

TEACHER LIBRARIAN PERCEPTIONS SURVEY EMAIL

A few days ago, you were sent a brief introductory letter introducing myself. I am conducting a study on the perceptions of the teacher librarian role and am asking for your voluntary participation in this survey.

The purpose of this survey is to determine how teacher librarians feel administrators and teachers within their school system perceive them. Please respond based on your own experience. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and will pose no foreseeable risk. Your responses will be kept anonymous and confidential. Participation in this survey will indicate your understanding and voluntary participation in this survey.

Please click on this link to continue with the survey and thank you for your participation.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/IPMGZ2N>

Mary Junker
University of Northern Iowa graduate student
School Library Studies

APPENDIX D

UNI INFORMED CONSENT

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW
INFORMED CONSENT**

Project Title: Misconceptions of the Teacher Librarian Role
Name of Investigator(s): Mary Junker

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

Nature and Purpose: The study is designed to determine how teacher librarians feel administrators and teachers perceive them and what role teacher librarians and library support staff provide in their buildings.

Explanation of Procedures: The participants will be obtained from the AEA267 directory and will include all teacher librarians with the exclusion of teacher librarians in my own district of North Butler Schools. The participants will be emailed an introductory email stating the purpose of the study is to determine misconceptions of the teacher librarian role. Participation will be voluntary. Two to three days later, the link to the survey through Survey Monkey will be emailed to participants with a follow-up and thank you email sent one week later. Participants in the web-based survey through Survey Monkey will be anonymous. No personal identifiers will be obtained. Participants may end their participation at any time. There are no foreseeable risks to participation.

Discomfort and Risks: There are no foreseeable risks to participation.

Benefits and Compensation: The participants will receive no direct benefit.

Confidentiality: Information obtained during this survey, which could identify you, will be kept confidential. Privacy will be respected and participants will be anonymous through the web-based Survey Monkey. No personal identifiers will be obtained. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized or lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions: If you have questions about the study you may contact or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study generally, you can contact Mary Junker_at mjunker@uni.edu or the project investigator's faculty advisor, Karla Krueger, at the School of Library Science, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-7241. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

Agreement:

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. By completing the survey, I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

APPENDIX E

THANK YOU/REMINDER EMAIL

Subject heading: Teacher Librarian Perceptions Survey

Thank you for taking time to participate in my research survey that was sent to you one week ago. If you have not done so, will you please respond within one week? The link to the survey is <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/1PMGZ2N>. Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey.

Mary Junker
University of Northern Iowa graduate student
School Library Studies

