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## The Education and Competencies of School Library Media Specialists: A Review of the Literature

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# The Education and Competencies of School Library Media Specialists: A Review of the Literature

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*The role of school library media specialists and the competencies they need in order to succeed have changed and expanded over many years. This paper reviews research and other publications related to competencies and the preparation of school library media specialists. Although few research studies directly address competencies and educational programs for school library media specialists, several have implications for one or both. First, Information Power (1988, 1998) and its relationship to competencies and preparation programs is discussed. Second, publications and documents that focus on competencies are reviewed. Third, research studies and conceptual papers with implications for competencies and preparation of school library media specialists are examined. Finally, conclusions and implications for research and the preparation of school library media specialists are offered.*

[Information Power](#) | [The Competent School Library Media Specialist](#) | [Role Conflict and the Instructional/Curricular Role](#) | [Interpersonal and Communication Skills](#) | [Leadership and Change Agency](#) | [Continuing Education and Professional Development](#) | [Future Scenarios for School Library Media Preparation Programs](#) | [Conclusions and Implications](#) | [Works Cited](#)

The recruitment and preparation of a new generation of school library media specialists has become acute as states and school districts face shortages likely to last for several years. Nearly twenty-five thousand new school library media specialists will be needed within the next ten years due to increasing school enrollments, expansion of full-time positions, and retirements (Callison and Tilley 2001). These new professionals will work in educational settings where fundamental changes have occurred. Technology will continue to transform teaching and learning and impact information access and retrieval. A standards-based approach to education and accountability is changing the focus of K–12 educators. The emerging educational paradigm calls for a shift from concern for what teachers are teaching to a focus on what students are learning. The best educational practices will include project or problem-based learning, an inquiry approach that emphasizes active learning, attention to the diversity of learning styles, technology integration, and authentic assessment. Two overriding questions emerge: What competencies will school library media specialists require in order to function effectively in such transformed schools? What has research revealed concerning the preparation that school library media professionals will need to become fully functioning members of their school communities?

Limited research has specifically examined the preparation or training of school library media specialists, but results of several studies have implications and sometimes specific recommendations for the education of school library professionals. Some of these studies relate to the roles and desired professional competencies of school library media specialists, while others focus on personal competencies and characteristics, such as interpersonal and communication skills. Historical and conceptual essays, position papers, and reports of practice related to these topics have been published. Groups of library media

professionals around the country have used national guidelines and standards for library media programs to guide them in the development of lists of competencies for school library media specialists in their states and school districts. These lists are often used to fashion job descriptions or evaluation instruments for school library media specialists.

Barron (1990) reviewed the literature on the education of school library media specialists for the first Treasure Mountain Research Retreat in 1989 (Woolfs 1990). He found little empirical research on either the education of librarians in general or school library media specialists in particular. There remains a shortage of empirical research on the preparation of school library media specialists.

The focus of this review is on research, reports of practice, and essays published since 1988. This date was used in order to concentrate on research studies and other documents available since Barron's 1990 review. However, certain pertinent publications and documents published prior to 1989 are included.

ERIC, *Library Literature*, and *Dissertation Abstracts* were searched using combinations and truncations of the following terms: competency, training, preparation, library education, librarians, school library media specialists, technology. To locate dissertations that do not specifically address the education or preparation of the school library media specialist but might have implications for such, *Dissertation Abstracts* (1987–1999) was searched for library science (0399) combined with codes assigned to each of the following subjects: education-elementary, education-secondary, education-curriculum and instruction, education-administration, education-adult and continuing, education-teacher training. In addition, *School Library Media Annual* research reviews and other publications known to the author were examined. International publications were not included.

In his review of the research on library media programs and services from 1925 to 1995, Callison (1998, 112) points out that reviews of research may "identify strong relationships over time and among various studies," however, their limitations should be recognized. He warns that generalizations should not be presumed from the results of studies that employ various methods, are carried out in different settings, and target different subjects or participants. The same advice is pertinent to this paper as well.

[\[Back to Top\]](#)

## Information Power

*Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (AASL and AECT 1988) includes a list of guidelines for initial preparation programs, certification requirements, and professional-development activities. This list was used by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the American Library Association (ALA) as the philosophical basis for developing the *Curriculum Folio Guidelines for the NCATE Review Process: School Library Media Specialist Basic Preparation* (AASL/ALA 1989, 1994). These documents have provided direction for the preparation of school library media specialists for more than a decade. Following the publication of *Information Power*, many position papers and results of a few research studies related to the preparation of school library media professionals began to appear in the library and school library literature. Researchers focusing on competencies and roles of school library media specialists have also used constructs from *Information Power* to develop their research questions.

In an analysis of *Information Power's* implications for the curriculum of school library media preparation programs, Royal (1989) called for a strong theoretical base that focuses on the needs of students. He identified several issues that the profession still faces more than ten years later: recognition of the master's degree as a requirement for entry into the profession; provision of continuing education and advanced degrees for practicing school library media specialists by library preparation programs; recruitment of qualified higher education faculty for preparation programs; and maintenance of adequate facilities and resources by preparation programs.

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) approved curriculum guidelines for school library media preparation programs in 1988 and 1993. Developed by AASL/ALA, "the guidelines are based on research results, expert opinion, and accepted best practices in the field" and are intended to

reflect the profession's national guidelines (1994, 4). The NCATE guidelines include both curriculum guidelines for preparation programs and a statement of the professional competencies that students are expected to master during their initial professional preparation.

To determine the impact of the ALA/AASL/NCATE guidelines on curriculum, Harada (1996) surveyed ALA-accredited preparation programs in 1993 and 1994. Of the fifty schools responding, over 80% reported that their programs provided courses that covered the nine competencies included in the guidelines. Callison and Tilley (1999) found that shifts in course offerings in twenty-five ALA-accredited programs for prospective school library media specialists during the past five years included more attention to multimedia, Web site, and video production; information literacy; user-needs analyses; collaboration and curriculum development; authentic assessment of learners; and diverse populations.

*Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (AASL and AECT 1998), the most recent guidelines for school library media programs, describes the school library media specialist as a curriculum, instructional, and technology leader who collaborates with all members of the learning community to create a student-centered library media program. Individual state and school districts are using the 1998 guidelines, *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*, as the basis for development or revision of job descriptions, standards, and evaluation instruments for school library media specialists (Illinois School Library Media Association 1999; Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board and the Office of Teacher Education and Certification 1998; Indiana Professional Standards Board 1999; South Carolina Department of Education 2000). Results of research studies using these guidelines also are beginning to appear (see, for example, Mosqueda 1999).

Using *Information Power* (1998) as a conceptual framework, faculty at the University of Maryland's College of Information Studies gathered data from participants who attended a one-day conference to review their school library media preparation program with an eye toward possible restructuring (Neuman 2001). Participants identified teaching and learning and program administration as areas that present the most serious challenges to school library media specialists and the most important to address in preparation programs.

[\[Back to Top\]](#)

## The Competent School Library Media Specialist

The School Library Manpower Project (1975), funded by the Knapp Shoe Company and administered by AASL, is the most comprehensive effort to identify the roles and job functions of school library media specialists and provide recommendations for school library preparation programs. One product of the project was publication of *Behavioral Requirements Analysis Checklist* (Case 1973) that lists approximately seven-hundred tasks to be performed by school library media specialists organized into seven major areas: human behavior, learning and learning environment, planning and evaluation, media, management, research, and professionalism. These job functions and task statements have been used to fashion the curriculum of school library preparation programs, articulate certification requirements for school librarians, develop performance assessment models, and design research projects that explore the competencies of school library media specialists.

A number of studies have examined competencies of school library media specialists as perceived by various audiences including school library media specialists themselves, classroom teachers, and school administrators. Others compare competencies emphasized in preparation programs and those perceived as most often needed in the world of practice.

Schon, Helmstadter, and Robinson (1991) found significant agreement between school principals and school library media specialists in Arizona on the competencies and skills school library media specialists should have. A random sample of principals and school library media specialists were asked to rank specific competencies in six areas: professional matters, library materials, management, human behavior, planning and evaluation, and learning. High on the list of both school library media specialists and principals were: a school library media program philosophy that supports education; encouragement of students in critical and

independent use of library materials and equipment; leadership for the development and administration of the library media program; an atmosphere in which faculty, students, and library media center staff work harmoniously; and the development of a library media program that supports the educational objectives of the school program. Only 3.4% of principals and 6.5% of school library media specialists surveyed placed a high priority on the school library media specialist as a leader in both the educational and the local community. The authors conclude that this high level of agreement indicates that principals understand the goals of the library media program and agree with school library media specialists in regard to which functions of the program are most important.

Kahler (1990) developed an evaluation instrument for school library media specialists in Texas based on performance indicators gathered from appraisal forms used in sixty-one school districts. Principals and school library media specialists ranked 101 indicators according to their measurability, importance, and how often they were performed. Among indicators that school library media specialists and principals eliminated were those related to planning, goal setting, and involvement in curriculum development. It is interesting to note that these are activities which current national guidelines (AASL and AECT 1998) and the professional literature identify as important. In fact, Kahler concludes that elimination of such indicators reveals a lack of vision on the part of respondents. Mosqueda (1999), on the other hand, found that principals and school library media specialists in sixty-seven National Blue Ribbon Schools in Florida supported the philosophy and guidelines for school library media programs as described in *Information Power*. The passage of almost ten years between these two studies was perhaps a factor. One could also speculate that personnel in these prize-winning schools are better informed regarding what the profession considers best practice. Results of Lai's (1995) study revealed agreement between elementary school classroom teachers and school library media specialists in three Tennessee counties regarding facets of the instructional consultant role for the school library media specialist. School library media specialists strongly agreed with teachers that sharing relevant resources is a role of the school library media specialist. Neither group strongly supported a role for the school library media specialist in designing and producing material for units of study. Both favored an integral role for school library media specialists in helping students develop the habit of reading but did not support their involvement in assessing student achievement in resource-based units of study. It appears that traditional support roles for school library media specialists in promoting reading and providing resources are more readily accepted than is the idea of their assuming a more central role in curriculum and instruction.

In a study comparing job competencies taught in preparation programs with competencies required on the job, Woodruff (1994) concluded that there is a need for more preservice training in the areas of public relations, planning and teaching library skills, and practical daily management and organization. Alumni from three universities who completed ALA-accredited library preparation programs during the previous seven years and who were currently working as school library media specialists were surveyed. Participants identified several competencies used on the job but not emphasized in their preparation programs. These include budgeting, handling operational functions, assisting parents, providing opportunities for critical thinking and problem solving, designing instruction and learning strategies, instructing students in information literacy skills, providing access to a wide variety of materials, and serving as an information specialist. Using evaluation and research techniques and participating in professional associations were identified as having been taught as part of their preparation programs but used less on the job. This researcher suggests that possible reasons for the low priority given to professional development or research are the day-to-day demands of the job and the fact that school library media specialists are not functioning in leadership roles within the school environment.

In recent years the introduction of computers for automation; management; and information storage, access, and retrieval has had a major impact on the set of skills school library media specialists need to function effectively on the job. Forest (1993) found that integration of technology into a school's curriculum is dependent on the active support and involvement of the school library media specialist. School library media specialists are devoting a substantial proportion of their workday to activities related to the diffusion of information technology (Forest 1993; McIntosh 1994). Such activities require competencies that must be addressed in professional training for school library media specialists. Both preservice preparation programs and in-service offerings include focus on these competencies. Seventy percent of the ALA-accredited programs that responded to Harada's (1996) survey offered technology-related courses to prospective school library media specialists. Callison and Tilley's (1999) more recent findings corroborate this trend.

Over the past five years, shifts in course offerings in twenty-five ALA-accredited programs include more courses related to technology.

In a paper written for the 1994 Treasure Mountain Research Retreat, Callison (1995) identified human behavior characteristics as critically important and called on school media preparation programs to "concentrate on the media person more than the development of the components of the media place" (101). Too often, students learn and apply skills that are necessary for the day-to-day operation of a library media center but are not engaged in developing a vision for a library media program nor are they exposed to the benefits of long-range planning. In addition, resource-based teaching and learning in which the school library media specialist collaborates with teachers in planning, teaching and assessing a full unit of study is often described in the university classroom but is seldom practiced on the job. And the preservice school library media specialist is typically involved in assembling resources and delivering skills instruction at the request of the teacher without being involved in planning. According to Callison, students need guidance in reflecting "on how the practice pieces fit into the whole system" (103).

The many competencies needed by successful school library media specialists are implied in *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (AASL and AECT 1998), the most recent set of guidelines for library media programs. A description of the four roles of the school library media specialist (teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator) and goals for the school library media specialists associated with each of the twenty-seven principles reflect the knowledge, skills, and personal dispositions necessary to mount an exemplary library media program. Revised ALA/AASL/NCATE accreditation guidelines based on *Information Power* will be available in 2002.

[\[Back to Top\]](#)

## Role Conflict and the Instructional/Curricular Role

National guidelines for school library media specialists (AASL and AECT, 1988, 1998) represent the best thinking of school library leaders. These guidelines describe the "ideal" roles of model school library media specialists and provide the foundation for development of job descriptions and evaluation instruments for school library media specialists. They also inform library school curriculum. What is found in guidelines, school library literature, library school curricula, as well as job descriptions and evaluation instruments, is often referred to as "theory" or a description of model practice. Role conflict occurs when this "ideal" role is not consistent with real working situations (Jones 1997; Person 1993; Pickard 1990).

Several researchers have studied the instructional or curricular role of the school library media specialist. National guidelines advocate a central role for school library media specialists. Research results indicate that students achieve at higher levels in schools with curriculum-integrated library media programs (Bingham 1994; Hara 1996; Lance 1994, 2000). Teachers in successful schools are more likely to cooperate with the school library media specialists than teachers in unsuccessful schools (Bell and Totten 1992). But, other studies indicate that school library media specialists do not perceive the role as highly important (Johnson, 1993), that their involvement in the instructional program is marginal (Jones 1997; Kinder 1995; Lewis 1990; Pickard 1990), and that they engage in this role less often than they were trained or would like to do (Bishop 1996; Jones 1997; Kinard 1991; Stoddard 1991). Results of Ervin's (1989) study of a random sample of two-hundred South Carolina school library media specialists indicate that a majority accept the curricular role and perceive that they implement the role on an occasional or regular basis. While there were no significant differences between acceptance of the curricular/instructional role and years of experience as a school library media specialist, years of experience as a classroom teacher, subject area previously taught, or education level, there were significant differences between specific aspects of such a role and years of classroom teaching experience and years of experience as a school library media specialist. Ervin recommended that school library media specialists enroll in courses that specifically address curriculum planning.

Factors that facilitate school library media specialist involvement in the school's instructional program have been identified in a number of studies. They include time for cooperative planning between classroom teachers and school library media specialists (Ervin 1989; Lumley 1994; Stoddard 1991), adequate staffing



of school library media centers (Kinder 1995), personal characteristics of teachers or school library media specialists (Fedora 1993; Hughes 1998; Johnson 1993; Yetter 1994), and a school culture or organizational climate characteristic of effective schools (Bell and Totten 1992; Chapman 1990; Hughes 1998). Putnam (1996) found that while library media specialists may perceive their instructional role as an important one, a fixed-schedule program is a barrier to actual practice of that role in elementary schools. In findings consistent with these results, Bishop (1992) concluded that the school library media specialist's role in an elementary school's literature-based reading program was more important after a flexible library schedule was introduced. Fedora (1993) also found that a flexible library schedule had a positive impact on the school library media specialist's ability to function in an instructional role.

Studies of exemplary school library media specialists indicate that they are considered important in their schools and they succeed in the roles outlined for school library media specialists found in national guidelines for library media programs including those related to curriculum and instruction (Alexander 1992; Gehlken 1994; Mosqueda 1999). The four exemplary school library media specialists studied by Alexander (1992) conformed to descriptions found in the professional literature and a list of desirable behaviors developed by library media professionals and school principals. These school library media specialists also possessed the characteristics of expert teachers as established by novice/expert studies on teaching.

School library media specialists in the three South Carolina Blue Ribbon high schools who participated in Gehlken's (1994) study were successful in developing and administering library media programs that meet the *Information Power* guidelines. But, the researcher noted that in only one of the three schools was the school library media specialist's teaching techniques considered interesting and innovative. Gehlken recommends that graduate programs in library and information science expand their requirements in order to prepare school library media specialists as teachers, as builders of positive working relationships with faculty, and as proactive administrators of their programs.

Mosqueda (1999) studied the perceptions of school library media specialists and principals in sixty-seven Blue Ribbon schools in Florida with a survey which was followed by visits to nine of the schools where she held interviews and profiled library media programs. Although unable to ascertain exactly how the library media programs contributed to their school's Blue Ribbon status, she did find positive affirmation of the roles and functions included in *Information Power*. Like Gehlken (1994), Mosqueda suggests that preservice school library media specialists receive instruction in learning theory, teaching strategies, and instructional design in order to enhance their ability to fulfill their role as teacher.

Several of the studies mentioned above suggest that the instructional and curricular roles as currently practiced do not reflect what is called for in national guidelines and professional literature. Deterrents faced by school library media specialists in their ability to form instructional partnerships with classroom teachers include lack of administrative support (Kahler 1990; Lai 1995) and lack of time due to the expansion of duties related to technology (Forest 1993; McIntosh 1994). Results of other studies indicate that school library media specialists are succeeding in instructional and curricular roles (Ervin 1989; Mosqueda 1999). Yet, even researchers who found that the school library media specialists have integrated new standards into their practice, call for additional or improved preparation in the areas of teaching and curriculum development.

[\[Back to Top\]](#)

## Interpersonal and Communication Skills

Results of several research studies highlight the importance of the school library media specialist's interpersonal and communication skills. In their study of the personality and communication behaviors of exemplary school library media specialists, Herrin, Pointon, and Russell (1985) found them to be confident, open to change, and effective communicators. Based on their finding that these model school library media specialists spent three-quarters of their time in oral communication, the researchers recommend that library educators teach interpersonal communication skills as part of their curriculum.

The characteristics and interpersonal skills of school library media specialists are important factors in

facilitating collaborative planning, innovative instructional approaches, and implementation of resource-based learning (Burks 1993; Farwell 1998; Hughes 1998; Johnson 1993). Johnson (1993) found that school library media specialists' confidence, initiative, communication skills, and leadership qualities were important factors for those who were active players in the total school curriculum and instructional program. Likewise, in her study of elementary school library media specialists participating in schoolwide adoption of a whole-language approach to literacy instruction, Hughes (1998) found that librarians must be knowledgeable and possess interpersonal skills in order to function as catalysts for such reform.

In a study of school library culture and climate, Chapman (1990) found that the school library media specialist's communication of the mission, goals, objectives, accomplishments, and contributions of the program was the key to making the library media center an integral part of the total-school program. Because of the important role teachers play in influencing students to use library media resources and services, Burks (1993) recommended that school library media specialists strengthen their lines of communication with that group.

In addition to employing communication skills to further involvement in curriculum development, these skills are associated with financial support for the library media program. Frequency of communication between school principals and school library media specialists concerning budget correlated with the number of dollars allocated for library media materials in Callison and Knuth's (1994) survey of library media programs in Indiana. Callison (1995) recommends that library educators seek school library media specialists who model this kind of involvement to serve as mentors and supervisors in field experience placements for preservice school library media specialists. Campbell (1991) discovered significant differences between elementary school principals' perceptions of their relationship to the library media program and the perception of the school library media specialist regarding the principals' role and recommended that school library media specialists use formal procedures to share information with principals.

There is overwhelming evidence of the importance for school library media specialists to possess effective communication and interpersonal skills. These competencies appear basic to all aspects of the work of school library media specialists and are judged essential by school administrators, teachers, and school library media specialists themselves.

[\[Back to Top\]](#)

## Leadership and Change Agency

Closely related to and overlapping interpersonal and communication skills are those proficiencies associated with leadership and change agency. Haycock (1991) acknowledged that the notion that school library media specialists should play a role in the school's instructional program has been (at least) implicit in national standards since 1960. Yet, "practice has not necessarily reflected the philosophy espoused in the national standards or guidelines, [and] that change, if any, has been slow" (62). She calls on school library media specialists to recognize that teachers, administrators, parents, and even school library media specialists themselves have not personally experienced the kind of library media program called for in national standards and guidelines. In order to raise the level of awareness of these members of the school community, the school library media specialist will have "to function as a facilitator and as a leader" and be proactive in articulating a vision for what library media programs can be (66).

Several researchers have concluded that leadership qualities are important to those school library media specialists who make positive contributions to their schools' reform and restructuring efforts. In her case study of one elementary school's efforts to implement a flexible-schedule library media program into the school's curriculum, Lumley (1994) found that success was dependent on the visionary leadership of the school library media specialist and a planning process for curriculum integration led by the school library media specialist. Characteristics related to leadership emerged as important in Yetter's (1994) study of resource-based learning in seven schools in Washington state. Personal characteristics of school library media specialists who were successful in implementing resource-based learning included leadership ability, ability to envision the practice of resource-based learning and connect it to the principal's agenda, and skill and stamina in working with teachers and students to implement the practice. Successful school library



media specialists were also risk takers and leaders in their schools' restructuring process. Results of Baldwin's (1995) study of the future directions of information systems to enhance learning in K–12 schools revealed that information professionals are central to ongoing change in education. She calls for inclusion of leadership training in preparation programs in order to prepare preservice school library media specialists for their role as change agents in their schools. Likewise, Vansickle (2000) suggests that school media preparation programs should specifically address the leadership role of school library media specialists. The 150 students enrolled in graduate level school library media preparation programs who responded to a survey conducted at five universities in the southeastern U. S. believed that the primary role of the school library media specialist is one of support rather than leadership.

In her study of four elementary schools implementing a whole-language approach to instruction in reading and writing, Hughes (1998) found that school library media specialists can function as change agents and catalysts for school reform. School library media specialists in the schools studied supported teachers by providing materials, modeling whole-language practices, and assisting them in developing problem-based research projects.

As leaders and change agents, school library media specialists actively promote their programs by making educators in their buildings aware of the potential contribution of library media services and resources to the educational program of the school. As part of her investigation into the nature and use of high school libraries in three Dallas, Texas schools, Burks (1993) found that teachers played an important role in influencing students to use library media resources and services, but that many were unaware of what the library media program had to offer them and their students. She suggests that school library media specialists should communicate and promote the value of the library media program. School library media specialists who participated in Gehlken's (1994) study of three Blue Ribbon high schools were proactive in selecting and administering special programs and services which contributed to the positive perception of users for each library media program. In her study of four exemplary school library media specialists, Shorey (1996) found them to be service-oriented and proactive. They possessed broad knowledge of the teaching and learning process and reflected on their own practice.

Although perhaps not commonplace in practice, leadership and change agency are receiving attention in national guidelines and professional literature. The significance of these functions has emerged from the results of many research studies on the roles of the school library media specialist. Experience, personal characteristics, and professional preparation together with continuing education, professional development, and mentoring are all factors in school library media specialists assuming roles as leaders and change agents in their schools and school districts.

[\[Back to Top\]](#)

## Continuing Education and Professional Development

Commitment to lifelong learning and reflective practice is imperative for all educators. Continuing education programs and professional development activities are acknowledged as essential for information professionals. Such offerings for practicing school library media specialists vary from state to state and from school district to school district in terms of format, availability, quality, and cost. A number of studies have looked at various aspects of continuing education for school library media specialists including content and delivery preferences, factors affecting participation, and types of formal and informal professional development activities.

Using a random sample of school library media specialists in the southeast region of the U.S., Dumas (1994) used a questionnaire to collect perceptions of school library media specialists related to (1) continuing education delivery systems and their effectiveness, (2) topics regarded as important both before and after participation in continuing education activities, and (3) motivation factors for participating in continuing education activities. Findings indicated that school library media specialists are motivated to participate in continuing education in order to gain new knowledge and skills. Before participating in continuing education, school library media specialists identified using computers for management as the most important topic. Following participation in such activities, participants identified providing services to

clients as the most important topic. Meeting informally with other school library media specialists was identified as the preferred and most effective method of delivery. Miller (1995) found that school library media specialists preferred attending state conferences and consulting with colleagues as methods for professional development but that participation in such activities did not necessarily mean that technical innovations were likely to be implemented.

Latrobe and Havener (1997) surveyed a random sample of 25% of the members of the Oklahoma Association of School Library Media Specialists in order to understand the motivation, constraints, and behavior patterns of a specific group of continuing education consumers. Respondents indicated that they used multiple types of continuing education providers for formal activities including the state department of education, colleges or universities, school districts, and professional organizations. Informal activities included membership in professional organizations, systematic professional reading, visits with other library media professionals, and networking. Factors found to influence participation in continuing-education activities, deterrents to participation in such activities, and strategies for lessening the impact of deterrents were also studied. The researchers concluded that attitudes concerning the importance of continuing education are strongly related to participation in those activities. For this reason, Latrobe and Havener suggest that library and information science preparation programs have a significant role in instilling their master's students with an appreciation for the importance of continuing education. They further point out that there is no one solution to format and delivery of continuing education offerings and that selecting appropriate modes of delivery can help alleviate deterrents to participation. It is imperative that library and information science preparation programs systematically monitor the continuing education environment to keep abreast of the needs of school library media specialists.

Because the role of the school library media specialist has changed and necessitates a new set of skills, Evans and Tipton (1992) recommend in-service programs and workshops that focus on those skills not covered in traditional preparation programs. These skills include interpersonal skills, grantsmanship, leadership, and change and communication strategies. The most extensive professional development initiative for school library media specialists in recent years was an important component of the national Library Power program funded by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. Created to elevate the role of libraries in public schools, the program focused on collection development, facilities refurbishing, flexible scheduling, collaboration, and professional development. Begun in New York City in 1988, Library Power programs were eventually established in nineteen communities across the United States over the next ten years. According to the Executive Summary (Wheelock 1999) of the evaluation report of the project, "professional development was the linchpin that held together the core practices and bolstered schools' capacity to make use of those practices" (13). For teachers, principals, and parents as much as for school library media specialists, professional-development programs focused on helping school-based teams develop the skills necessary for collaboration and for integration of library media and other information resources into teaching and learning. In qualitative case studies conducted in elementary schools participating in the Library Power program, Giorgis (1994), Shannon (1996), and Tallman and Tastad (1998) also found professional development activities essential to success in cooperative planning and collaboration among school community members.

[\[Back to Top\]](#)

## Future Scenarios for School Library Media Preparation Programs

The professional preparation of school library media specialists was one of many topics on the agenda of the 1994 Treasure Mountain Research Retreat that focused on future scenarios for library media programs. Several manuscripts developed for this conference (and published in the 1995 volume of *School Library Media Annual*) reflect what is found in much of the research cited in this paper.

The increased importance of school library media specialists' direct work with students and teachers was a common thread in several papers presented at the conference. As educational paradigms shift, the K–12 curriculum will have a real-world focus in which students are engaged in authentic projects (Papas and Tepe 1995). In order to integrate information skills (basic to student success within the context of these

future scenarios) into the curriculum, school library media specialists will have to work closely with teachers in planning instruction as well as co-teaching and evaluating units of study. Aaron (1995) describes the classroom teacher as content specialist and the school library media specialist as educational process specialist. Preservice school library media specialists will need mentors who are able to model the collaborative planning process. As part of field experience and internships, prospective school library media specialists should practice alongside supervising school library media specialists who are engaged in the highest level of collaboration and curriculum development (Callison 1995).

According to Crowley (1995), school reform and restructuring should present opportunities for school library media specialists (and others in the educational community) to assume leadership roles. A goal for programs preparing future school library media specialists to function as information educators must be to assist their students in making the paradigm changes in their own thinking necessary to assume roles as "leaders, change agents, and curriculum consultants" (Pappas and Tepe 1995, 43).

[\[Back to Top\]](#)

## Conclusions and Implications

Although there is not a large body of empirical research that directly addresses the education and competencies of school library media specialists, a number of researchers have found implications for both in the results of their investigations. These largely descriptive studies are primarily based on perceptions and attitudes. Haycock (1995, 114, 118) has pointed out that research has revealed much of the "what" and the "why" of issues related to the practice of school librarianship but little of the "how."

Several studies have examined the instructional and curricular roles of the school library media specialist. Findings are mixed; some indicate that school library media specialists are embracing this role and that teachers and administrators recognize it as important. Results of other investigations point to role conflict. National guidelines and the professional literature call for collaboration and the establishment of instructional partnerships between school library media specialists and classroom teachers, but many school library media specialists either do not agree that these activities are important or they face deterrents in their ability to function in such roles.

How can preparation programs affect the perceptions and expectations of prospective school library media specialists and move practicing school library media specialists beyond the traditional model that emphasizes materials management toward a role that focuses on collaborative teaching and curriculum development? In her review of research and research-based publications from the ERIC database related to the teaching role of school library media specialists, Small (2000) asks: "What kinds of experiences (e.g., courses or internships) must preservice library and information science graduate programs provide to school library media students to best prepare them for their teaching role?"

In addition to basic knowledge of educational theories and best practices, prospective school library media specialists require the competencies necessary for establishing and promoting their instructional and curricular roles, such as program planning and priority setting. Candidates also need to recognize the importance of developing skills for involving representatives from the school community in planning and policy-setting activities for the school library media program. Research studies that identify specific strategies used by successful school library media specialists and studies that explore the culture and climate of schools where school library media specialists are leaders in curriculum development and instruction will be valuable to both practitioners and library educators.

We know that exemplary school library media specialists have good interpersonal and communication skills. Specifically, what are the interpersonal and communication skills they possess? What kinds of interpersonal skills should be required of candidates entering preparation programs? Should library education programs screen candidates for these skills or for their potential to develop them? What kinds of interpersonal and communication skills can and should be taught? How can preparation programs assist students in developing or honing these skills? How are these skills best assessed? Answering these questions pose fundamental challenges for library educators.

National guidelines (AASL and AECT 1998, 52) declare that "steady and visionary leadership is widely evident in effective school library media programs" and research studies cited here confirm this. Because there are still many in the school community who do not have a clear understanding of the potential contribution of the library media program, school library media specialists must become proactive in articulating their roles. They must also be ready to explain how their programs are related to education reform initiatives and to the skills students will need to succeed in the twenty-first century. What are the characteristics of leadership that library preparation programs can develop and nurture in students? How can preparation programs and professional development activities support prospective and practicing school library media specialists in developing the leadership skills they will need in order to function as change agents in their schools? How can students be encouraged to seek opportunities to assume leadership roles when they enter the profession?

A commitment to lifelong learning and professional growth is crucially important. Candidates should leave their library education programs with the mindset that they have just begun their professional preparation and that it will never end. How do practicing school library media specialists maintain and update their competencies? It has long been acknowledged that a one-year preparation program may not be sufficient for information professionals, including school library media specialists. A few ALA-accredited programs have moved to a two-year curriculum, but time and economic constraints are serious roadblocks to such efforts in most places. This reality makes continuing education and professional development for school library media specialists an important activity from the very start of their careers. Where should practicing school library media specialists look for such opportunities? One of many lessons learned from the evaluation of the national Library Power program is that professional development must be sustained, schoolwide, and include teachers, school library media specialists, and administrators working together to change the culture of learning in their schools (Zweizig and Hopkins 1999). What kinds of professional-development activities are best offered to school library media specialists as a group and what kinds are best offered to groups that include school library media specialists, classroom teachers, and administrators?

Not addressed in the studies and publications cited here are important topics for research. These include distance education and alternative avenues to certification for prospective school library media specialists. Both of these topics are critical issues given the current shortage of school library media specialists faced by states and school districts across the country. What are the characteristics of effective distance-education programs? Is it possible for preparation programs to collaborate in distance-education endeavors? What provision can and should be made for alternative routes to certification for school library media specialists?

The current role of the school library media specialist has evolved over many years. The mix of professional and personal competencies needed by today's school library media specialist is indeed complex. Technology, teaching, collaboration, and leadership have become more prominent in national guidelines and in the professional literature. Results of research studies and reports of best practice that address this multifaceted set of competencies will benefit both practitioners and library educators.

[\[Back to Top\]](#)

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[[Back to Top](#)]

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