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Examining the Challenges and Practices of our Russian Partners in the Institution of Teacher Librarianship

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Examining international teacher librarianship enables school library researchers and practitioners to continue uncovering the institutional factors that impact school librarianship; further strengthening the case for cross-cultural partnerships. In 2015, researchers conducted an institutional ethnography confirmatory study of school librarianship in Moscow, Russia. Emergent themes culled from previous research and confirmed in this new study were: collaboration, literacy, instruction, technology integration, and the learning environment. Confirmation of these themes in Russian school librarianship indicates teacher librarians around the world struggle with strikingly similar challenges despite varied contexts and socioeconomic situations.

Introduction

Information, and dis-information, continue to expand, increasing calls among employers, community leaders, the business sector, parents, and other stakeholders, for information literate graduates – young adults who can locate, evaluate, analyze, and utilize information in this century’s highly technological environment. A global phenomenon, the expansion in the production, availability, and access to information has greatly impacted the professional practice of teacher librarians around the world. As our profession adapts to this international challenge, it is important that we constantly explore and examine how teacher librarians are redefining school librarianship in the information age. Teacher librarians in Russia, a global superpower, are no different. While Russia faces unique challenges related to its political history, large landmass, and cultural institutions, many of the issues tackled by this country’s teacher librarians are similar to those addressed by other nations previously examined, including the impact of economic disparity on education access and quality (Kosaretsky, Grunicheva, & Goshin, 2016).

In the fall of 2015, one of the authors of this paper was invited to spend a few weeks in Moscow as a cultural exchange representative for the United States Embassy. This invitation came from the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, celebrating its 150th year. As part of this celebration, the institution hosted programming that brought together researchers and musicians from around the world for a series of lectures, musical concerts, teaching observations, and other events designed to highlight the conservatory’s contributions to Russian culture. The openness and willingness of educators to engage in rich conversations regarding Russian schools led to an unprecedented

opportunity to examine Russian school librarianship in an urban setting. In addition to multiple site visits, the authors reviewed academic research on Russian school librarianship, connected with Russian teacher librarians and students, and reviewed Russian student artifacts of learning.

Research Purpose

Extensive previous research in Brazil and Germany (Green & Johnston, 2015, 2016; Johnston & Green, 2014; Johnston, 2013a, 2013b, 2017) utilized institutional ethnography to explore the experiences, practices, and challenges faced by teacher librarians as they attempted to meet the needs of today's learners. The research questions addressed by institutional ethnography are about common problems and experiences, as well as the desire to make changes that address those problems. Therefore, this research again asks the question, "what are the similarities in the experiences and practices of teacher librarians across international boundaries in efforts to meet the needs of 21st century learners?" The purpose of this research is more confirmatory, rather than exploratory, in that the themes discovered in previous research served as an a priori coding framework for this investigation.

Review of the Literature

A Brief History of Russian School Librarianship

Russian school librarianship and its role in the development of reading and information literacy has, in many ways, followed a similar path to school librarianship in other economic powerhouses such as the United States and Brazil (Kosaretsky, Grunicheva, & Goshin, 2016). During the 1970s, Russian libraries educated users on accessing information through catalogs and card files, emphasizing the development of lifelong reading habits. By the nineties and early aughts, the emphasis shifted to personal computing, database usage, electronic information retrieval and computer literacy (Gendina, 2012). However, unlike the United States at 241 years of age, and Brazil, at 197 years young, Russia traces its national history (Ray, 2016), as well as the history of the library's place in education, back to the 9th and 10th centuries: "In 988 Prince Vladimir gathered children of all the noble people in Kiev and made them study books in the libraries. Since there were no textbooks at that time and educational literature was absent, children studied religious books" (Zhukova, 2012).

This practice continued in the 1100s with the founding of monasteries that housed educational libraries, growing with the establishment of parochial schools near those monasteries in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In the 1600s, Lavrentii Zizania, a Ukrainian monk living in Moscow, authored *The Science of Reading and Understanding Slavonic Writing*. The first book published specifically for young Slavic readers, contained an explanatory dictionary, "Lexis," included to help children become literate and independent learners (Bushkovitch, 1992, Gendina, 2012). By the late 1800s, school libraries were a part of almost every Russian high school (Vaneev & Minkina, 2006). Tatiana Zhukova, former president of the Russian School Library Association, explained that Russian pedagogues from this era "regarded the school library as one of the most important parts of the training and learning process... unanimously remark[ing] that it took libraries that contained the best books of humanity to teach children to read, respect, and be able to take advantage of all the education, moral, and ethical use that the books contained" (Zhukova, 2012, p. 147).

After the October Socialist Revolution of 1917, the subsequent Civil War ending in 1922, and World War II, the number of school libraries fluctuated, reflecting the civil unrest and damages typically seen in war theater. However, by the 1960s and early 1970s, the Soviet Union folded school libraries into a centralized library network “characterized by the uniformity of work and library collections, which were stocked according to the recommended list given by the USSR Ministry of Education” (Zhukova, 2012, p. 149). In 1975, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) Ministry of Education approved “Standard Regulations about School Libraries,” a document that set levels of acceptability for school library collections and paved the way for books to be provided at no cost to individual schools (RSLA, 2007). Vaneev and Minkina (2006) highlighted the establishment of interschool libraries – libraries that serviced schools and communities, or several villages, or school and university partnerships.

Ultimately, the largest impact the Soviet Union had on Russian school librarianship was in its standardization of the profession and on the financing of collection development. The impact of this financial support explains why *Perestroika*, a political movement that eventually led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, also resulted in massive cuts to library books and supplies, and a crisis in collection development many Russian school libraries are still attempting to recover from today (Keller, 1987; Pinskaya et al, 2013). In 1992, a new Russian Education Law invoking “humanization,” “differentiation,” “democratization,” and “pluralization” was put into place (Polyzoi & Dneprov, 2011, p. 161); a pedagogical shift reflected a decade later in Zhukova’s (2012) claims Russian school library work is based “on principles of democracy, humanism, availability, ethic values, civil society, and freedom of human development” (p. 150). The new law moved administrative and fiscal responsibilities from the national government to local regions. This decentralization, coupled with rising support for school-based management, school choice, and school-based curriculum development, “led to increasing inequalities between regions and within them” (Gurova, Piattoeva & Takala, 2015, p. 350).

The Russian School Library Association

In 2004, The Russian School Library Association came into existence. Its founding was in response to a perceived lack of government guidance on the unique role of the school library in education. RuSLA made its strategic goal “the development of Russian school libraries as a catalyst [sic] of education, improving the quality of children’s life processes, and developing the creative potential and infrastructure for school libraries and its specialists” (Zhukova, 2011, p. 309-310). To that end, it focused on four main issues identified as crucial challenges facing Russian teacher librarians: 1) professional advocacy and protection of teacher librarian interests; 2) improving the status and perception of school libraries and teacher librarians; 3) supporting professional networking and partnerships across Russia and internationally; and 4) leadership for reading promotion and development of civic, information, and functional literacy.

RuSLA’s founding and its immediate growth, resulted in 2009 parliamentary hearings in the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. These hearings sought to enhance the status of school libraries, and request that teacher librarianship be formally legislated under any new educational reforms. In 2011, the Russian Prime Minister and the Minister of Education and Science created the new job title “librarian-pedagogue;” a decision that would hopefully “provide librarians with all the social guarantees of pedagogues and make librarians a member [sic] of the pedagogical community” (Zhukova, 2011, p. 316).

Socioeconomic Disparity in Educational Settings

Soon after, testing and quality assurance made their way into a modernization reform package introduced through the *State Program for Education Development in 2013-2020*. This legislation invoked the implementation of the following throughout the Russian Federation: state regulation of educational activities, assessment of education achievement, procedures for independent quality evaluation, education program accreditation, and Russian participation in international studies (Government of Russia, 2012). Despite the effort to re-centralize, legislation was not supported with equitable and substantial funding resulting in socioeconomic disparity:

“The schools of Russia have in effect been divided into two categories: schools for the children of parents who are educated and well off, and schools ‘for the rest of them.’ This second group of schools consists primarily of those located in the small towns and rural areas. They are not well equipped, they are housed in old buildings, and the teachers are generally retired or close to retirement age...Not surprisingly, schools located on the far periphery, as a rule, regularly turn out low educational results” (Valeeva, Vlasova, and Monakhov, 2010, p. 33)

At the time, Valeeva et al (2010) found well-funded schools graduated two and a half times more students than poorly-funded schools, thus reinforcing social inequality. Years later, Pinskaya et al (2016) examined data collected by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and found teachers working with the most challenging students had lower educational qualifications and less training than teachers working at well-resourced and comfortable schools.

The socioeconomic disparity between schools in various regions of the Russian Federation is mirrored in its school libraries. A decade ago, a broad examination of school library collections found 16% of non-fiction texts were out of date and 32% were damaged and/or worn-out (Starovoitova et al., 2007). The same examination found a stark difference between urban school libraries, with collections of 33,000 volumes, and village school libraries, with collections of 8,000. With a recent government focus on information-based teaching methods and information technology infrastructure (Zair-Bek, Belikov, & Plekhanov, 2017), funding for collection development has not improved. New books are shipped to schools at random, in limited quantities and varieties, and teacher librarians are not given monies for additional purchases: “The Russian school library is in conflicted condition right now; its high goals do not match its collection poverty” (Zhukova, 2012, p. 151).

Methodology

Institutional ethnography (IE) investigations look at everyday experiences and knowledge of everyday people. IE is utilized to explore “the ways in which every day work (understood in IE as being anything that people do that requires effort, intent, and some acquired competence) is experienced, talked about, and made sense of by people at a local level” (Tummons, 2017, p. 147). IE is a way to look at “how things happen *here*, in the same way they happen *over there*” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 69). IE is applicable to the purpose of this research: to examine the practices of teacher librarians in Russia in meeting the needs of 21st century learners; and to identify the ways these practices are similar or different from teacher librarians in other countries. IE is a systematic, recursive mode of inquiry that begins with “the experience of the individuals in a local setting, but aiming to go beyond what can be known at that local setting” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 59). The goal of IE is to build empirically informed arguments based on real-world practices occurring in the institutional setting; and to provide ways of examining practices for the people that actually experience those situations (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Leckie, Given, & Lushman, 2010; Smith, 2005).

Data Collection

IE mines from, and within people's everyday experiences in the workplace. In IE, the researcher "inquires, investigates, examines, and observes," but does not impose (Given, 2008, p. 434). The researcher learns by encountering actualities through observing or talking with those that are directly involved. Therefore, the researchers in this study utilized observation and semi-structured interviews to collect the data. This qualitative data was utilized to develop a description of what the participants do in their everyday work life and how they understand their own experiences (DeVault & McCoy, 2006; Given, 2008). Three school site visits were conducted; locations purposively selected for offering the most opportunity for intense study due to accessibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; DeVault & McCoy, 2008).

Observation

Observation was employed to explore and explicate work practices, to understand the setting, the organization of the setting, and record informal interactions (Tummons, 2017). This research utilized an observation protocol adapted from Johnston (2013b). The researchers recorded observations and verbal exchanges concerning school library policies, procedures, and practices; the school library collection and facility; types of activities taking place in the library; technology usage; and the roles of teachers and the teacher librarian.

Semi-Structured Interview

The process of "talking to people" allows participants to share their experiences from their own perspective, of their own interest, and about their own knowledge (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 18). This leads to what Smith (2005) calls their work knowledge, "which encompasses both a person's own experience of their work – how they do it, why they do it, how they feel about it – and also the ways in which one person's work is coordinated with the work of others" (Tummons, 2017, p. 150). There are not set standard questions for an IE interview. Rather, questions arise organically, coming from observations, previous informal conversations, and a researcher's knowledge of the area under investigation. With the help of a Russian translator, informal semi-structured interviews were conducted with three teacher librarians. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed by a Russian speaker. Transcriptions were then reviewed by two external Russian citizens. Photographs and detailed field notes were also kept to enrich the data.

Description of Sites and Participants

The first site, located in a large private Russian university in Moscow, is one of the largest high schools in the Russian Federation with an enrollment approaching 1500 tenth and eleventh graders (eleventh grade being the last grade before university studies begin). Students are split among three separate campuses throughout Moscow, and take additional classes at the partner university once a week. This particular high school is a lyceum, defined as a precollegiate, professionally-oriented school that has entered into an official partnership with an institution of higher learning (Egorov, 2005). Lyceums can be public or private, depending on the institution they have partnered with, and most admit students based on aptitude tests and other signs of academic promise. This school focuses on economics, mathematics, social sciences, design, information technology, and engineering. Its financial structure is also tied to the university system.

The library visited was one of three school libraries (one for each lyceum campus) and was split into two rooms separated by a glass wall. One room housed the librarian, the circulation

computer, and several rows of large shelving cabinets holding textbooks and non-fiction material. The other room, a sunny and quiet space, contained 24 larger desks pushed together to form tables; a copy machine, plenty of plants, and a few shelves with fiction and non-fiction titles (these seemed to be older than the titles kept in the librarian's work space). While there were no computers or computer labs as part of the library, wi-fi was available and all students observed had their own devices in hand. The librarian, *Maria* (pseudonym used to protect interviewee identity), was a certified school teacher with over thirty years of teaching experience. She became the campus librarian in 2013 and obtained her library training through courses offered by the Ministry of Education. She worked closely with the university librarian and the other two campus librarians, but otherwise, was alone at this location.

The second site, a comprehensive secondary school administered by the Ministry of Education, pairs the core curricula with an in-depth study of the Spanish language. The school services students ages 6 to 15 years of age, with a preschool and primary school housed in different locations. While the second site is a public school, parents are still responsible for purchasing any additional courses or materials beyond the basic core. Additional costs include educational programming in physical education, fine arts, foreign language, and advanced mathematics; uniforms, textbooks, and BYOD (bring your own device) technologies.

Depending on availability, students from other areas of Moscow can apply for a transfer, enrolling at this site. The school library was located on the second floor in a large, bright, and busy room. It contained shelves crowded with textbooks, fiction, and non-fiction titles. The atrium in front of the library was also used to display different book collections and titles separated by age range and reading interest. There were tables taking up much of the floor space, and piles of books, crafts, and student projects at every turn. There were also three stand-alone computers, but these appeared to be a bit outdated. The librarian, *Olga* (pseudonym), was an active member of RuSLA and took every opportunity to embed the library into the life of the school. A certified teacher, she spent much of her career teaching younger children. She was in her 9th year as a teacher librarian, and considered herself a teacher whose classroom was now the library. Like Maria, Olga worked alone at this location.

The third site is a large secondary lyceum serving ages 14 through 18 (grades 8 to 11). A state budgetary education institution, the lyceum is in partnership with a public university, and has established a project-based curriculum specializing in the humanities (French and English language immersion available), biology, chemistry, socioeconomics, mathematics, and information technology. As part of its project-based focus, the school employs certified teachers, as well as city and industry professionals who teach additional course options. As with the other sites visited, parents are charged additional fees for these opportunities. The library was a newly remodeled space with fresh carpet, open shelving, and large windows. While the school building had wi-fi, due to a quirk in the structure of the building, the signal was too weak within the library. As a result, there were several computer monitors in one corner, and a landline for students to plug in their laptops as needed. The librarian, *Anna* (pseudonym), was in her ninth year as a teacher librarian, having previously worked as a technical librarian and before that, a civic engineer. She completed library training courses through the Ministry of Education and kept up to date with RuSLA online trainings and resources.

Data Analysis

The researchers conducted confirmatory thematic analysis to assess the replicability of emergent themes identified in previous research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Onwuegbuzie & Teddie, 2003). A deductive approach was employed through the application of a priori coding scheme comprising

those themes: a) collaboration, b) information literacy, c) instruction, d) technology integration and e) learning environment (Green & Johnston, 2015, 2016; Johnston & Green, 2014). Data from the transcripts, the observation questionnaire, photos, and field notes were coded three times. To strive for inter-coder reliability, the two researchers coded the extracted data in parallel, but separately. Then, differences were discussed until agreement on appropriate coding was achieved. Finally, all data was entered into NVivo and coded by node, so that each node represented a theme according to the a priori coding scheme.

Findings

This section describes and discusses the themes identified in previous research by the authors of this paper, and confirmed through the current study. These were: a) collaboration, b) literacy, c) instruction, d) technology, and e) the learning environment. These five themes reflect common practices and challenges faced by Russian school library programs, such as the influence of school mission on collaboration; the influence of government initiatives on school library reading materials; access to technology, and the impact of socioeconomic disparity on school library programming and materials. All themes highlight the unique ways in which Russian school libraries reflect the rich tapestry of Russian culture and history, the legacy of *Perestroika* educational funding, and the influence of partnerships with institutions of higher learning, business, and city government.

Theme 1: Collaboration

As defined in previous research (Green & Johnston, 2015), collaboration represents a relationship that “facilitates the sharing of meaning and completion of activities with respect to a mutually shared superordinate goal” (Sonnenwald, 2007, p. 3). In teacher librarianship, the ultimate goal is student learning. The theme of collaboration includes practices related to partnering with teachers to teach literacy skills, supporting content acquisition, and working with other professionals in the building, such as the technology specialist. Various collaborations were described by the Russian participants, including working with content area specialists and teachers. A sub-theme that emerged in this study, not emphasized in earlier studies, was the collaboration with public librarians.

Maria, teacher librarian at the private lyceum school, did not co-teach or collaborate with teachers, although she mentioned getting their input on what books they would like for her to order. Instead, she collaborated with her school’s partner university and its content librarians to support student preparation for university entrance exams. Although Anna also taught at a lyceum school, she collaborated with teachers to plan different activities like library lessons, contests, and author studies. Though she stated these initiatives were not specifically based on specific learning goals, she believed their purpose was to enrich the overall learning environment for the students and to promote books and reading. There were many products of these collaborations observed in the library in the form of student projects displayed throughout, and photographs of previous contest and events. Anna also spoke about her collaborations with the partner university librarian. At the time of the interview, they were collaborating on ordering decisions, the organization of events and contests, and the planning of library lessons for the subsequent school year.

Olga, teacher librarian at the comprehensive secondary school, described a variety of collaborations she had undertaken with teachers. She would often pull resources and materials for teachers or students depending on the topic of study. Collaborations with teachers went beyond this basic level though; Olga described meeting with teachers at the beginning of each year to flesh out instructional plans, identify needed resources, and discuss how they would implement those plans. She also met with teachers to plan various excursions or field trips, including several to the public

library. Olga described this process as a true partnership: “Sometimes I come up with an initiative. Sometimes teachers come up with an initiative. So, it’s a partnership. There is no very strict procedure. We support one another.” She explained that she worked hard to create these collaborative relationships and that when working with different types of people, she found some were more open to working with her than others, so she used different approaches. She also spoke of the importance of continually updating teachers on what she did as a teacher librarian, reminding them she was not a vehicle for checking out books, but rather, a colleague who was there to support them, and to encourage a love of reading in the students.

Olga spoke of “working in league with” the public libraries in Moscow. She frequently planned field trips to public libraries to help students “get acquainted with new library technologies.” In a library video, students were enthusiastic about these visits, commenting, “we are not only introduced to the equipment but also allowed to take a closer look, to keep it in hands, to use it ourselves.” Olga valued the collaborative relationships she maintained with public librarians, working with them to promote public library services to her students, including free subscriptions to electronic libraries and databases. Olga credited the public librarians with helping her stay up-to-date on professional trends, and with organizing great reading events for her students.

Theme 2: Literacy

The second theme in the a priori coding scheme was literacy, defined as “a collection of cultural and communication practices shared among members of particular groups [so that] as society and technology change, so does literacy” (LILE, 2014). Data coded under the second theme spoke of reading instruction, collection development, access to reading materials, as well as activities related to reading promotion. Russian libraries have long held themselves responsible for helping children and youth citizens develop a reading culture. Even during the censored Soviet-Era, “literacy was important to the Soviets, book publishing flourished, and it was an accepted ideal that no person should have to walk more than fifteen minutes to get to a library” (Knutson, 2007, p. 716).

Maria oversaw a library that served as an extension of the university library with which her school was partnered. She dedicated all of her time to helping students navigate academic texts and didactic material. Since all of her students were 10th and 11th graders, she did not feel they needed to be persuaded to read outside of their study areas. However, she frequently encouraged students to use their devices to download e-books from the partner university’s library collection. Two of the site participants, Olga and Anna, intentionally developed library policies, procedures, and programming to support the development of a reading culture.

Anna taught students traditional Russian handcrafts, book design, and art. Once students’ interests were piqued, she led them to books in her collection that taught them how to expand on these skills in different ways. Olga held a schoolwide competition called *The Gifted Reader*. Students were encouraged to put together an artifact that represented their favorite book (e.g. a poster, painting, a model, sewing project, or even a cake!). All artifacts were brought to school during a special event, and students presented their projects while dressed as a character from their chosen book. Winners received certificates and ribbons, and were highlighted in a promotional video on the school’s website.

Maria and Anna, both located at lyceums with partner university libraries, had to collaborate with the university librarians when ordering books. Maria submitted her book requests but was not allowed to purchase books on her own. Anna worked closely with her university librarian to develop a joint order. Both expressed freedom in being able to select materials for their collections, yet still acknowledged the space taken up by texts the government purchased for their schools. Olga, the only study participant who was a teacher librarian during the Soviet-Era, described how collection development for school libraries used to be the responsibility of the government, when

books were pre-selected to promote *Partiinost*, party mindedness, and the development of moral character. Books were then delivered at random times – a pattern that still continues as all three participants pointed to books pre-selected and delivered by the Ministry of Education.

Even so, Olga explained that she was looking forward to a new system that would make it possible for her to order books directly for the library. However, she struggled with a slightly different problem, the problem of space: “the majority of those who graduate – who finish school, donate their books. They’re very willing and eager to have someone read their books...all books, textbooks, didactic books, whatever they have. They don’t need it when they finish school. So, our problem is a different sort of problem. The problem is to find room for all the books that you’ll want to shelf.”

Theme 3: Instruction

The third theme, instruction, was defined as planning or delivering some type of instruction whether to an individual, a small group, or whole group (Green & Johnston, 2015). The influence of Russian culture and tradition on instruction emerged as a subtheme. Maria, Olga, and Anna all spoke of being teachers and instructing students, but each lived out this role in unique ways according to their differing school situations. In the pre-collegiate lyceum, Maria was assigned a group of students that come in to work with her each day on a set schedule. The main focus of her instruction was to help students to prepare for university entrance exams. In addition to the assigned student study groups, she also helped any other student who came to study or prepare for planned academic contests. While Maria self-identified as both a librarian and a teacher, she said she was first and foremost a librarian. In her role as a teacher, it was her job to guide students through their studies.

Olga, at the secondary comprehensive public school, was much more involved in instruction and co-teaching. Not only did she work with teachers to plan library lessons, author studies, and readers theater, but she also instructed students as a co-teacher. Student work resulting from this instruction was observed throughout the library and Olga talked about the different projects she taught, highlighting the ways she gave students choices on how they demonstrated their learning. This was evident in the dioramas, artwork, and the readers theater performances that were observed. She spoke of lessons on Russian folklore that she and a classroom teacher put together, where she took the lead on instruction. Evidence of an ongoing author study she was conducting with students on Roald Dahl, an author the students selected, was documented during the site visit. Sometimes Olga went to classrooms to provide instruction because her library space was undergoing renovations. Olga habitually made videos about the school library program to highlight the many events, competitions, and instruction provided to demonstrate that the library was an “exciting” place to visit.

Anna was also very involved in organizing and co-teaching library lessons, Russian author studies, and examinations of Russian folklore, sometimes a result of her planning with teachers and sometimes a result of teachers coming to her for support. Student projects from this instruction were observed throughout the library, such as traditional Russian handicraft projects to demonstrate mastery of Russian folklore, as well as displays on important Russian authors. Co-taught lessons were observed with both the teacher librarian and the teacher providing instruction to students as they worked on a folktale reading comprehension activity. She described in detail an author study on a science fiction writer that she taught earlier in the school year. Students learned about the author using a variety of media including newspapers, cartoons, and film and then demonstrated their learning by answering questions and drawing pictures. Anna took responsibility for pulling all the materials ahead of time for co-taught lessons.

In all three libraries, the importance of Russian culture and literature was a constant, threaded through much of the instruction and collaboration taking place. Author studies prioritized Russian authors, and students were incentivized to engage with Russian folk arts and crafts, and Russian traditional stories. At the comprehensive secondary school, many students were observed wearing traditional Russian outfits for their presentations. As evidenced by data collected under the Literacy theme, the role of the library as a vehicle for instruction on Russian history and tradition is a key influence on Russian school librarianship. Each library visited contained large book collections of Russian works deemed by the Ministry of Education as essential reading for student character development, and all three librarians made sure students were exposed to these books in their instruction.

Theme 4: Technology Integration

The fourth theme, technology, includes the use of technology for instruction, social media participation, technology in testing, and technology for library administrative purposes (Green & Johnston, 2015). The majority of technology practices at all three sites was for administrative purposes. All three schools had automated circulation systems and computers for administrative uses, such as downloading catalog records for books. Additionally, all three schools had wi-fi access for all students, though in Anna's school, the wi-fi signal was too weak in the library. Instead she offered students connections where they could plug in their own devices. In looking at student use of technology, the bring your own device (BYOD) approach was, by far, the most prevalent in all three schools. Maria stated that while her school had computer labs and computer terminals that could be reserved by teachers and students, most of the students preferred to use their own devices. This assertion was confirmed during the site visit when many students were observed using a variety of devices, such as tablets and cell phones, while studying in the library.

At the secondary comprehensive school, students were observed using a computer workstation to create book trailers. However, the workstations were out of date and like Maria, Olga stated the students usually preferred to use their own devices. Students using their own devices in the library were also observed at Anna's school. The popularity of BYOD at all three schools supports Gendina's (2012) assertion that Russian teacher librarians struggle to help students navigate digital information environments since much of these environments are accessed on privately-owned devices. It also confirms the importance of RuSLA's advocacy efforts toward updated school library technology and stronger teacher librarian professional development on technology-enabled learning (Zhukova, 2011).

All three librarians parlayed student ownership of devices into opportunities to promote access to e-books and online databases, although their approaches differed. Maria continuously reminded students they had access to e-books from the public library and from the partner university, but also stated this as her rationale for not purchasing any fiction titles. Olga described the popularity of e-books, finding that even the youngest students were able to access and read them. These subscriptions were through the public library, not the school, and as described in the collaboration theme, Olga worked with the public library to advertise this resource to her school community. Anna had plans to curate an e-book collection for her library. Unfortunately, she lamented that these plans were on hold indefinitely due to lack of funding. Perhaps due to the lack of school library computers and student preference for BYOD, there was no mention or discussion of social media activity, digital citizenship, or teacher librarian use of social media to promote school library activities.

Theme 5: The Learning Environment

The fifth theme confirmed through this study, the learning environment, identifies practices teacher librarians undertake when creating a physical space that is conducive to meeting the needs of 21st century students. Data coded under this theme included student artifacts of learning, school library displays, and organization of library materials and space. All three libraries were in active use when visited. Students were seen reading, studying, working on their own devices, and browsing the shelves.

All three librarians vocalized the importance of maximizing access to the library space. They exhibited relaxed attitudes toward circulation and checkout policies, allowing students to check out multiple books for weeks at a time, with renewals available online. Olga explained “I don’t adhere to certain strict rules...I approach all children individually. I know whether they are diligent or not. So, I ask them why they need so many books, for example, and I always am flexible about it.” All three librarians displayed student projects or papers, awards, and newspaper clippings of student achievements and school events. They made it clear that the library belonged to the school and to the community. The first site, a lyceum associated with a large, private university, was one of three lyceum libraries (one for each of the lyceum’s three campuses). It was the smallest library of the three visited, the approximate size of a standard classroom. However, students at this school had access to the partner university’s libraries, including a large e-book and online database collection, resources Maria frequently promoted through posters and verbal reminders. While Maria did not display student work other than student papers, she made sure that any materials displayed were new and in great shape. She also surrounded the library with large potted plants to give the space a welcoming and homey feel.

Olga oversaw the most crowded library of the three sites visited. Due to a large collection of donated books, shelves were overflowing and difficult to navigate. Even so, students were able to easily locate new books or popular book series because Olga displayed these separately in the atrium. She also made a habit of pulling books and sharing these with classroom teachers. Anna carefully organized the library by genre so that students could easily find books of interest. The current Ministry of Education still sends books that must be included in all libraries. Anna separated these in a different section: “This is the so-called ‘Program.’ It is called the Presidential Librarian Program. It stands for one hundred Russian authors which all children have to read.” Overall, Anna felt her space organization efforts in the new library were somewhat successful. She beamed when discussing the enthusiastic and daily visits by fifth, sixth, and seventh graders. Like Maria, Anna kept her library open after school and welcomed any student who wanted to use the space for study, for reading, or just for spending time.

Discussion and Conclusion

IE work-setting research studies are often developed in response to a vague, persistent concern about a situation and the people it affects (Stooke, 2010). In the context of this study, the concern centers on the practices of the teacher librarian in meeting the needs of 21st century learners, and how these practices are shaped by institutional characteristics and culture. This study situated institutional ethnography as a qualitative *conceptual* research framework that de-emphasized the terms typically associated with qualitative research and, instead, applied confirmatory methodology. Within this framework, qualitative thematic analyses attempted to determine the “replicability of previous emergent themes (i.e. research driven)” (Onwuegbuzie & Teddie, 2003) found in previous research conducted by the authors (Green & Johnston, 2015). This study concluded that the themes

of a) collaboration, b) information literacy, c) instruction, d) technology integration and e) learning environment, though replicable among Russian teacher librarians, were uniquely influenced by and interpreted through the lens of Russian political and cultural history, as well as linguistic differences.

The two themes that most exemplify this influence are information literacy and technology integration. The term “information literacy” does not convey the same meaning in Russian as it does in English. Due to its strong association with basic levels of reading and writing, the word literacy, in Russian, dilutes the complex relationship between an individual and information. Instead, Russian researchers and educators across a broad range of fields prefer the term *information culture* (Gendina, 2012). Information culture is more than the abilities to access, evaluate, use, and generate information, “the concept also includes a motivational component and information outlook...closely connected with the sphere of culture” (Gendina, 2012, p. 191).

A review of Russian school library publications by teacher librarian leaders and researchers indicates a unique perspective on the role librarians play in developing an individual’s information culture. There is a distinct separation between components of information culture developed through being exposed to and reading high quality literature, becoming familiar with Russian folklore, fine art and philosophy – facets of the humanities; and components of information culture developed through technology fields. Olga reflected this belief when she stated:

I think the most important thing is this habit of reading because when one forms this habit of reading, one can switch from fiction literature to academic literature. First, it starts with fiction literature – perhaps reading for pleasure. And then, one goes on to read, uh, academic books, professional books. But if one doesn’t form this habit, it will be more and more difficult, over time, to form this habit and one will be shy, and shun any opportunity to read.

It isn’t surprising that none of the three librarians interviewed expressed great concern over the lack of computers in the library and student preference for personal devices. Much of the literature reviewed for this paper indicated Russian teacher librarians do not see digital literacies as being newer skill sets. Rather, information-communication technologies are simply a newer setting for the information culture skills a student develops through a rich reading life: “The Internet has not ‘canceled’ the traditional library, and the personal computer has not relieved a person from needing to comprehend independently and to critically analyze received information” (Gendina, 2012, p. 187).

This contextualization of digital literacy as an extension of a rich information culture, paired with high rates of internet access and portable device coverage across the Russian Federation reposition the school library as a place for the personal, character, and academic development of its users, a space where students can freely interact with information whether in print or through electronic access. As evidenced by statistics on the availability of computer labs versus personal devices, and the large number of students observed with their own devices during this study, Russian schools prefer the latter. While 86% of Russian schools are equipped with computer labs, 99.5% of urban and 93.75% of rural schools boast high-speed internet access for personal device use (Zair-Bek, Belikov, & Plekhanov, 2017).

The upside, is that the school library does not find itself replaced by, or competing with a computer lab. The downside is that formal instruction on information culture is removed from the purview of the teacher librarian; and like observed in previous studies of Brazilian school-based librarians, given over to the study of informatics (e.g. computer usage, programming, multimedia technologies) (Gendina, 2012; Green & Johnston, 2016). This separation makes it difficult for Russian teacher librarians to lead in the development of “students’ awareness of the integrity and continuity of modern information environments (traditional and electronic) and, accordingly, the fusion and

inseparability of all major phases of work with information: to search, analyze, synthesize information, and independently design any information product" (Gendina, 2012, p. 201). Both Olga and Anna hinted at this concern when describing field trips to public libraries to expose students to technology tools for learning, and procurement of funds for digital resources curated by the teacher librarian.

RuSLA further formalized this problem by listing it as a major priority for the decade ahead of 2011. The organization advocates for improved technical equipment and "broadening implementation of informational communicational technologies in school library practice," as well as "renewing and developing training, retraining, and qualification training systems for school librarians" (Zhukova, 2011, p. 316).

Despite the confirmatory nature of this study, the data collected during this study represents the content that teacher librarians chose to share with the authors. The Russian Federation encompasses almost 7 million square miles. Therefore, the conclusions of this study are not representative of the entire field of Russian school librarianship. The data collected represent only the locations visited in the Russian capital of Moscow, its most populous city (Rosstat, 2018).

The primary function of this study was to confirm emergent themes found in the institution of school librarianship from other countries (e.g. U.S.A., Brazil, Germany), continuing to build "an understanding of the informants' experiences in order to show how these institutional work processes are organized" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 123). More data is needed to uncover and further describe institutional factors that shape teacher librarian experiences and practices on an international scale – work that the authors continue to pursue. As evidenced by this study, teacher librarians around the world struggle with strikingly similar challenges despite varied contexts and socioeconomic situations. Examining international teacher librarianship enables our profession to build partnerships that will help teacher librarians and school library researchers continue to uncover the institutional factors that impact school librarianship. These partnerships are crucial as we learn from one another, benefiting 21st century students the world over.

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