



## **Educating Pre-Service School Librarians for the Instructional Partner Role: An Exploration into University Curricula**

Judi Moreillon, Texas Woman's University

Sue Kimmel, Old Dominion University

Karen Gavigan, University of South Carolina

### Authors' Note

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Judi Moreillon, School of Library and Information Studies, Texas Woman's University, P. O. Box 425438, Denton, Texas 76204-5438. Contact: [jmoreillon@twu.edu](mailto:jmoreillon@twu.edu).

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### **Abstract**

*In Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs (2009), the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) identified the instructional partner role of school librarians as the most critical role for the future of the profession. To determine the extent to which school librarian preparation programs prepare pre-service school librarians for this role, this mixed-methods case study examined program ranking responses and questionnaires from nine universities and colleges that prepare these candidates for practice. Instructors who teach courses in school librarianship submitted a program of study document on which they rated the percentage of readings/viewings and assignments that focus on the instructional partner role in courses offered exclusively for pre-service school librarian candidates. Participants were invited to complete follow-up questionnaires that asked for details regarding readings, textbooks, and assignments. The findings of this case study demonstrate a tendency for school librarian preparation programs to assign different priorities to the five roles identified by AASL; developing the instructional partner role was not ranked first for most of the programs under study. These programs also integrate into their courses various textbooks, book chapters, articles, and other resources focused on instructional partnerships. The results of this case study*

suggest that the academy does not teach with a unified voice when it comes to helping pre-service school librarians prepare to practice the instructional partner role.

## Introduction

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) prioritized the leader and instructional partnership roles of school librarians in *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs*. As an instructional partner, the school librarian “collaborates with classroom teachers” (2009, 17) and “understands the curriculum of the school thoroughly and can partner with teachers to create exciting learning experiences in an information- and media-rich environment” (2009, 19). Studies have shown that a positive correlation exists between student achievement and instructional collaboration between school librarians and classroom teachers (Achterman 2008; Library Research Service 2013). School administrators correlate a successful educational program with an active, collaborative, and resourceful library program (Lance, Rodney, and Schwarz 2010). Audrey P. Church found strong support among elementary (2008) and secondary (2010) principals for the school librarian’s instructional partner role. School librarians who effectively practice instructional partnerships have opportunities to make a positive impact on student learning and on student achievement on standardized tests (Library Research Service 2013) and serve as leaders and change agents in their schools (Todd, Gordon, and Lu 2011). Given the acknowledged importance of the instructional partner role in the practice of school librarianship, how are library education programs preparing pre-service school librarian candidates to practice instructional partnerships?

## Literature Review

### Introduction

This case study rests on three areas of scholarship in the fields of school librarianship and education: standards for school librarianship, the instructional partner role, and the challenges inherent in pre-service education.

### A Review of School Librarianship Standards

For more than fifty years the American Association of School Librarians has recommended that instruction in library skills be a cooperative endeavor as school librarians collaborate with classroom teachers. In 1960 AASL published the *Standards for School Library Programs*. This document and the one that followed in 1969, *Standards for School Media Programs*, both suggest a team approach to instruction. In *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (AASL and AECT 1988), the term “instructional consultant” was used to describe the cooperative planning role of school librarians. In the revision to that document, *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (AASL and AECT 1998), the term “instructional partner” was used to further emphasize the school librarian’s role as a teaching partner with classroom teacher and specialist colleagues. As stated in the AASL *Position Statement on the Value of Library Media Programs in Education*, library “instruction occurs best in the context of the school curriculum where students have a need to know and are guided by a standard of excellence set by their classroom teachers in collaboration with the school librarian” (2006).

Most recently, in *Empowering Learners* AASL identified the instructional partner as the most critical role for the future of the profession. The theoretical framework that guided this study is built on the importance of the instructional partner role of school librarians as represented in the literature. The study is also founded on studies that address the essential role librarian preparation programs play in preparing pre-service school librarians for developing the skills and dispositions of an instructional partner.

## Research and Support for the Instructional Partner Role

Research supports the connection between classroom-library collaboration and student learning. The majority of the School Library Impact Studies reported by the Library Research Service (2013) indicate a positive correlation between student achievement on standardized tests, particularly in reading, and school librarians' collaborative work with classroom teachers. Collaborative teaching resulted in a positive impact on student outcomes in terms of information literacy learning, as well (Chu, Tse, and Chow 2011; Lance, Rodney, and Schwarz 2010; Todd, Gordon, and Lu 2011). Many school administrators associate a successful educational program with an active, collaborative, and resourceful library program (Lance, Rodney, and Schwarz 2010), and they value the school librarian's role as an instructional partner (Church 2008, 2010). A growing number of scholars in the field of school librarianship claim instructional partnerships are key to the school librarian's role as leader (Haycock 2010; McGregor 2003; Todd 2011; Zmuda and Harada 2008). In *Empowering Learners* (2009) AASL added the role of leader to the school librarian's areas of responsibility and practice.

Violet H. Harada (2005) found evidence of professional learning in a multi-year study during which teams of school librarians and teachers collaborated through practitioner research. Marcia Mardis and Ellen Hoffman (2007) surveyed librarians in Michigan for their role in collaboration with science teachers and found a significant relationship between the degree of collaboration and student achievement on science tests. The *Position Statement on the School Librarian's Role in Reading* (AASL [2007] 2010b) comments on the instructional role of the school librarian in reading development and is cited in *Empowering Learners*: "School librarians are in a critical and unique position to partner with other educators to elevate the reading development of learners" (AASL 2009a, 22).

To be sure, the primacy of the instructional partner role is not universally accepted among scholars in the field. Marcia Mardis (2011) suggests that research from the 1980s demonstrated the pitfalls in building a school library program around collaborative partnerships. Some researchers and educators of school librarians identify the information specialist role as having substantial potential, if not the most potential, for school librarian improvement and leadership (Everhart 2007; Everhart, Mardis, and Johnston 2011). Nancy Everhart and Eliza T. Dresang (2007), who studied school librarians preparing for National Board Certification, determined that universities needed to develop more courses that emphasize the school librarian's leadership role. As Daniella Smith, who conducted a study that used a leadership pre-assessment instrument to measure pre-service school librarian candidates' leadership skills, noted: "because school librarians have an impact on the entire school, it is essential for them to flourish as leaders during their transition from teachers to school librarians who are integral assets to school communities" (2014, 64).

Increasing evidence in the field shows that school librarians are effectively practicing the instructional partner role. Eleven school librarians and their coteaching partners reported their

first-hand “how-to” experiences in the March 2012 “Coteaching” issue of AASL’s *Knowledge Quest* journal. These articles provide the librarians’ and the classroom teachers’ or specialists’ perspectives on what made their coteaching experience successful for students and for educators. Along with other essays, research, and articles, a number of these coteaching expert pieces appear in the *Best of KQ: Instructional Partnerships: A Pathway to Leadership* (Moreillon and Ballard 2013). These examples show that instructional partnerships are valued by school librarians and classroom teachers alike and further support the national professional association’s commitment to promoting this role.

## Challenges in Pre-Service Education

Although a growing body of research examines the instructional role of the school librarian in student achievement, and more and more evidence has been provided by practitioners in the field, there are currently few studies that have examined the ways in which library preparation programs prepare pre-service school librarians for their instructional roles.

The American Library Association and AASL recognize two kinds of professional degrees as minimal for school librarianship: either a Master’s degree from a program accredited by the American Library Association (ALA) or a Master’s degree “with a specialty in school librarianship from a program recognized by AASL in an educational unit accredited by NCATE” (AASL 2010a). AASL and ALA issued the *Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians* (2010a); these have also been approved by the National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE). Programs seeking this recognition are subject to ongoing evaluation and review based on these standards. The first of these standards addresses the role of the school librarian and includes language that candidates “model and promote collaborative planning.” The third element under this standard is that of “Instructional Partner” and explicitly states: “Candidates model, share and promote effective principles of teaching and learning as collaborative partners with other educators” (AASL 2010a, 1). In June 2013 NCATE and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) came under the umbrella of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), and subsequent accreditation will be conducted through CAEP. Meanwhile, programs previously recognized by NCATE maintain their recognition as providers of educator preparation, including school librarians.

Church et al. compared the AASL/NCATE standards, *Empowering Learners*, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), National Education Technology Standards (NETS), Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) and found common themes—including collaboration—in every set of these standards except for the CCSS. As school librarians are also licensed by each state, various state regulations impact the curriculum of school library preparation and may account for some variations. Related to the integration of standards through pre-service coursework, Church et al. suggested that “content and standards should be addressed across courses rather than concentrated in a course or two” (2012, 215).

In pre-service graduate-level library science education, student learning outcomes are measured in terms of skills gained and attitudes changed as a result of candidates engaging in coursework. Pre-service classroom teachers’ beliefs about teaching are generally well formed before they enter the university (Pajares 1992). This prior knowledge affects what pre-service teachers learn in their preparation courses. “These preconceptions come from years and years of observing people who taught them and using this information to draw inferences about what good teaching

looks like and what makes it work” (Hammerness et al. 2005, 367). One could speculate that this reliance on preconceptions is also true of pre-service school librarians.

One of the challenges of pre-service education, then, is to prompt future educators to question their preconceived notions about what constitutes effective teaching and, in the case of this study, preconceived notions about the practice of instructional partnerships in the context of serving in the role of school librarian. The university classroom is a laboratory for the practice of librarianship outside of the classroom. In this context, what is learned is the direct result of what learners “do” during their coursework (Jeng 2011). As Kirsty Williamson, Alyson Archibald, and Joy McGregor have noted, “We know that [teaching] in isolation doesn’t tend to improve practice; teachers working together improves practice enormously” (2010, 26–27). What interventions in pre-service education help future school librarians prepare to effectively practice instructional partnerships?

Some studies have examined the instructional partner or collaborative role of the school librarian in particular universities. Don Latham, Melissa Gross, and Shelbie Witte (2013) conducted interviews with faculty in both library and information science (LIS) and education programs at a large southern university. Faculty were asked to discuss their own experiences of classroom-library collaborative practices in their K–12 careers and to identify courses in their programs that included collaboration. The study results showed that collaboration was more likely to be a discussion topic in LIS courses than in education courses. Judi Moreillon (2013a) examined one university course in depth for the candidates’ perceptions about how the course changed their understanding of the instructional partner role of the school librarian. Candidates identified partner work and the requirement to work with at least three different classmates as critical; they also mentioned the importance of multiple assignments, especially the collaborative lesson planning assignment, as instrumental in their development as instructional partners. School librarian candidates are often classroom teachers, and Mardis (2013) reported on one English teacher who saw the importance of collaborating with her school librarian as a result of the teacher’s school library coursework. Joette Stefl-Mabry, Elyse Dequoy, and Sandra Stevens (2012) examined the field notes from school library practicum students and noted that one of the greatest difficulties identified by candidates was facilitating group teamwork among K–12 students. While this finding did not specifically address the instructional partner role, it is suggestive of the general difficulty candidates have with understanding and promoting collaboration.

In the 21st-century education environment in which student learning outcomes and teacher proficiency are under constant scrutiny, school librarians are wise to show how their work positively addresses both student achievement and improved instructional practices. “We have much more work to do (and more noise to make) to gain recognition for real school librarians as defined in *Empowering Learners* as co-teachers who are leaders with a particular knowledge of curriculum and instructional design, not story ladies whispering ‘Shhhhhh’ and covering classes to provide teachers release time” (Kimmel 2011a, 17). As Church posited, “School library media preparation programs must prepare their graduates to positively present their key instructional roles” (2008, 25).

## Research Questions

Both qualitative data and descriptive statistics were gathered for this study. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. How does coursework offered in ALA-accredited and NCATE-accredited school librarian preparation programs support Master's candidates in developing the instructional partner role?
2. Is there a difference between these two types of programs?
3. How do educators of school librarians describe the support offered in their programs for developing the instructional partnership role?

## Study Participants

Participation in the study was elicited from the membership of the Educators of School Librarians Section (ESLS) of AASL at various meetings between June 2012 and June 2013 and through the ESLS discussion list. In addition, members of the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) School Librarian (SL) Special Interest Group (SIG) who attended the ALISE annual meeting in January 2013 were invited to participate.

## Survey Instruments

Using a ten-point scale, participants were asked to rate each course designed specifically for school librarian candidates in their plan of study for readings and assignments that supported the instructional partner role (see Appendix A). Each point on this scale was considered to represent ten percent of the readings or assignments. For the purposes of this study, educating for the instructional partner role was defined as “developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to jointly plan and implement standards-based lessons and units of study with classroom teachers and specialists.”

In addition, a four-part follow-up questionnaire was used to gather more-specific information about educating for the instructional partner role (see Appendix B). The questionnaire asked participants to provide specific information about course materials and assignments related to the instructional partner role, as well as the study participants' perceptions of the relative importance of the role in their programs.

The researchers obtained permission to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Board at Texas Woman's University.

## Methodology

This study was a comparative case study which used a mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis. Both qualitative research and descriptive statistics were gathered. The mixed-methods approach was used to collect “a richer and stronger array of evidence than can be obtained by any single method alone” (Yin 2009, 63). In this study we conducted a case analysis of universities and colleges that have school librarian preparation programs accredited by ALA and NCATE (now CAEP). Data from nine of these institutions were compared.

According to the ALA website, the total number of ALA-accredited universities and colleges located in the United States is fifty <[www.ala.org/cfapps/lisdir/lisdir\\_search.cfm](http://www.ala.org/cfapps/lisdir/lisdir_search.cfm)>. According to the ALA/AASL website, the total number of CAEP-accredited universities and colleges located in the United States is thirty-eight <[www.ala.org/aasl/education/ncate/programs](http://www.ala.org/aasl/education/ncate/programs)>. Using these numbers provided by ALA and AASL, a total of eighty-eight school librarianship education

programs in the United States are accredited by ALA or NCATE (CAEP); therefore, the nine institutions that participated in this study represent 10.2 percent of the U.S. institutions that prepare school librarians.

Both qualitative research and descriptive statistics were collected through course materials rankings and a follow-up questionnaire. The instruments were developed by the researchers since no existing instruments were in the literature. The three researchers collaborated on the writing of the ranking and questionnaire items to ensure that they were reliable and had a high level of content validity. The researchers also shared these instruments with their respective school librarian educator colleagues.

Data collection was facilitated via e-mail. Faculty who teach in school librarian preparation programs reported the title and number of courses designed for school librarian candidates only and rated each course designed exclusively for school librarian candidates in terms of the percentage of readings and assignments that focused specifically on the instructional partner role. The researchers provided a sample program of study that included an explanation of the ratings. Participants also responded to a follow-up questionnaire in which they ranked the relative importance of each of the five AASL roles of the school librarian and gave examples of exemplary readings, textbooks, and assignments that focused on the instructional partner role.

The qualitative data were analyzed through the collection and comparison of the instructional partnership course content and assignment ratings determined by educators who teach in ALA- and CAEP-accredited institutions. The researchers, from three different universities, analyzed the data from the rating system results and questionnaires. The qualitative data were hand-coded for specific assignments, collaborative learning experiences, collaboration, course materials, and other key components of school librarian preparation programs. These data were read and re-read to identify patterns and themes.

Among the findings anticipated from this study, in addition to perceptions about the relative importance of the instructional partner role in school library coursework, was an overview of the various plans of study and types of coursework that characterize various programs. Along with a compilation of the readings, resources, and assignments that participants identified as key to preparing future school librarians for this valued role, this study provides a snapshot of these institutions' commitment to teaching—even privileging—this role in their school librarian preparation courses.

This study employed a comparative case study method that looked at two cases: NCATE-accredited programs and ALA-accredited programs that prepare school librarians. Cases were also examined for common themes. Given that the role of “instructional partner” was identified in the profession’s guidelines, *Empowering Learners*, as the most important role for the future of school librarianship, this study also analyzed that document for the use of the term. Findings are reported for each case followed by a discussion across cases and including the case of *Empowering Learners*.

## Findings

### NCATE-Accredited Schools

#### Programs and Courses

Table 1 provides background information on the five programs that comprise the NCATE program case for this study. The numbers of courses are those that were designed for school librarian candidates only.

Table 1. Information about NCATE-accredited programs studied.

	Academic Unit	# Courses
C1	COE	9
C2	COE	8
C3	COE	9
C4	COE	7
C5	COE	6

The NCATE-accredited schools were without exception embedded in colleges of education (COE) and offered students add-on licensure for school librarianship with a possible Master's degree in education. School library programs were found in departments of teaching, education, or instructional technology. These programs prepare school librarians only and do not offer credentials for public, academic, or other kinds of librarianship. On its website, one program did provide links to an ALA-accredited program for students interested in pursuing an ALA-accredited Master's degree in librarianship.

NCATE-accredited schools reported six to nine courses targeted specifically to school librarianship for a total of thirty-nine courses across all of the programs. Two of the course titles specifically mentioned curriculum or collaboration. Every one of the five programs had a course with more than 50 percent of the assignments and/or the readings related to the instructional partner (IP) role.

### Readings and Assignments

Participants from NCATE-accredited schools reported an average of 2.7 or 27 percent of the assignments and 22 percent of the readings as being related to the IP role with a range from 0 to 90 percent for assignments and 0 to 100 percent for readings. Two courses were reported to have 100 percent of the readings related to the IP role while seventeen of the thirty-nine courses reported zero readings focused on the IP role. For assignments, two courses were reported to have 90 percent related to the IP role; thirteen or one-third of the assignments did not address the IP role.

### Rankings of Roles

In the follow-up questionnaire, participants at NCATE-accredited schools ranked the five AASL-designated roles as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Rankings of the roles by participants from NCATE-accredited programs.

Role	Rankings	Mean
Leader	1, 1, 4, 4, 5	3
Instructional Partner	2, 2, 2, 3, 4	2.6
Information Specialist	1, 3, 3, 3, 4	2.8



Teacher	1, 1, 2, 3, 5	2.4
Program Administrator	2, 4, 5, 5, 5	4.2

Overall, participants from NCATE schools ranked the role of teacher most important followed by instructional partner, information specialist, leader, and, finally, program administrator. The instructional partner role was often ranked second (3 out of 5 programs) but never ranked first, and no programs ranked it last. The teacher and leader roles each received two first-place rankings, but the role of teacher was also ranked last by one program.

### Programmatic Support for Developing the Instructional Partner Role

The follow-up questionnaire asked participants to provide more in-depth data to further explore their programs' priorities and programmatic support for helping pre-service candidates develop their expertise in the area of instructional partnerships. All of the participants that provided program of study documents responded to the follow-up questionnaire.

### Readings and Textbooks in NCATE Programs

The second question on the follow-up questionnaire asked participants to identify exemplary readings focused on instructional partnerships. Programs offered textbooks, textbook chapters, articles, or other resources. One NCATE program mentioned a book *Partnerships for Lifelong Learning* (Farmer 1999). One program cited sections of two chapters in *Empowering Learners* (AASL 2009a): Chapter 1, VI: "The Changing Role of the School Librarian" and Chapter II, specifically I. "Building Collaborative Partnerships."

One NCATE program cited an article that appeared in *School Library Research*: "Toward a Theory of Collaboration" (Montiel-Overall 2005). This article was also cited by an ALA program. Two additional articles were mentioned by NCATE programs: "More than Shushing and Shelving: School Librarians are Important Allies in Helping Students Become Scholars and Problem-Solvers" (Ballard and Fontichiaro 2010) and "Make the Move from Collaboration to Data-Driven Collaboration" (Buzzeo 2008b). Another cited a paper contributed to the Treasure Mountain Research Retreat, "The Work of the Learning Commons: An Ecosystem of Gifts" (Kimmel 2011b).

Another follow-up question asked participants to identify one or more textbooks that focus specifically on school librarians serving in the instructional partner role. Two NCATE-accredited programs cited the entire *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* book (AASL 2009a); both of those programs also use *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner in Action* (AASL 2009b). Two other NCATE programs use the "Teaching for Learning" section of *Empowering Learners* for this purpose. Programs also cited the resources listed below (textbooks or specific chapters within books).

### NCATE Program Textbooks

American Association of School Librarians. 2009a. *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs*. Chicago: ALA.

American Association of School Librarians. 2009b. *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner in Action*. Chicago: ALA.

Crowley, John. D. 2011. *Developing a Vision: Strategic Planning for the School Librarian in the 21st Century*, 2nd ed. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

Farmer, Lesley S. J. 2011. *Instructional Design for Librarians and Information Professionals*. New York: Neal-Schuman.

Johnson, Doug A. 2013. *The Indispensable Librarian: Surviving and Thriving in School Libraries in the Information Age*, 2nd ed. Columbus, OH: Linworth.

Turner, Philip M., and Ann Morrow Riedling. 2003. *Helping Teachers Teach: A School Library Media Specialist's Role*, 3rd ed. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

### **NCATE Program Book Chapters**

Bishop, Kay. 2007. "The Curriculum." In *The Collection Program in Schools: Concepts, Practices, and Information Sources*, 4th ed. by Kay Bishop. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Crow, Sherry R. 2005. "Collaboration: The Heart of Information Literacy." In *Information Literacy: A Guide for the Library Media Specialist* by Sherry R. Crow. O'Fallon, MO: Pieces of Learning.

Harper, Meghan. 2011. "Information Literacy in Reference Work." In *Reference Sources and Services for Youth* by Meghan Harper. New York: Neal-Schuman.

Morris, Betty J. 2010. "Forging Proactive Leadership and Partnership in Media Centers." In *Administering the School Library Media Center*, 5th ed. by Betty J. Morris. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

### **Exemplary Assignment in NCATE Programs**

A question on the follow-up questionnaire asked respondents to identify an exemplary assignment focused on instructional partnerships. A respondent from every NCATE-accredited program represented in this study noted a lesson or unit plan assignment as an exemplar focused on the instructional partner role. The participants provided varying depth in their descriptions for the lesson plan assignment. School librarian candidates in four of the NCATE programs conduct this assignment with classroom teachers in the field. The response for one program simply provided a Web link to lesson plans. (It was not possible to determine the extent to which the plans archived on a collective wiki were authored by individual candidates or by teams of classmates or with librarians or other educators in the field.) Respondents from the other four NCATE programs provided a description that included who was involved in the collaborative planning and/or implementation or assessment of the lesson and student learning outcomes.

All lesson or unit plans described or linked are to be based on curriculum standards and *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* (AASL 2007). Several plans mentioned information literacy skills instruction; other descriptions were not that specific. Two descriptions made mention of assessing pre-K–12 student learning outcomes. Due to a lack of instructions as to how detailed this response should be, the specifics of the data are not as useful as the overall finding that study participants from NCATE-accredited programs considered a collaborative lesson or unit plan to be an exemplary assignment focused on the school librarian's instructional partner role.

## ALA-Accredited Schools

### Programs and Courses

Table 3 provides background information on the four programs that comprise the ALA program case for this study.

Table 3. Information about ALA-accredited programs studied.

	Unit	# Courses	Dual ALA-NCATE Accreditation
A1	COE	3	No
A2	iSchool	7	Yes
A3	SLIS	4	Yes
A4	COE	5	Yes

One of the four ALA-accredited schools was in a school of information science and one was in an iSchool. Two were departments within colleges of education. An interesting finding was that, according to their websites, three of the four ALA-accredited schools also had NCATE accreditation for their preparation of school librarians. In each of these three school librarian preparation programs students have the option of pursuing a Master's degree in library and information science. All four of these programs prepared academic, public, and other information professionals as well as school librarians.

The ALA-accredited schools reported three to seven courses targeted specifically to school librarianship for a total of nineteen courses across all of the programs. Every one of the four programs had a course title that specifically mentioned curriculum, collaboration, or instructional partnerships. All four programs had a course in which more than 50 percent of the assignments and/or the readings related to the IP role.

### Programmatic Support for Developing the Instructional Partner Role

As mentioned previously, the follow-up questionnaire asked participants to provide more in-depth data to further explore their program's priorities and programmatic support for helping pre-service candidates develop their expertise in the area of instructional partnerships.

### Readings and Assignments

Participants from ALA-accredited schools reported an average of 3.9 or 39 percent of the assignments and readings as being related to the IP role with a range from 0 to 100 percent for assignments and 10 to 100 percent for readings. One course was reported to have 100 percent of its readings related to the IP role while another course was reported to have 100 percent of its assignments related to the IP role. For only two courses were zero assignments reported to be related to the IP role, and every course had at least ten percent of the readings related to the role.

## Rankings of Roles

In the follow-up questionnaire, ALA-accredited schools ranked five AASL-designated roles as shown in table 4.

Table 4. Rankings of the roles by participants from ALA-accredited programs.

Role	Rankings	Mean
Leader	1, 3, 5, 5	3.5
Instructional Partner	1, 1, 2, 3	1.75
Information Specialist	1, 2, 4, 5	3
Teacher	2, 3, 4, 4	3.25
Program Administrator	2, 3, 4, 5	3.5

Overall, participants from ALA-accredited schools ranked the role of instructional partner the highest followed by information specialist and then teacher. The roles of program administrator and leader both averaged a 3.5 ranking. Two schools gave instructional partner the top ranking, and no schools ranked it lower than third. Leader and teacher also received a first ranking by one program. The roles of teacher and instructional partner were never ranked last.

## Readings and Textbooks in ALA Programs

When responding to the follow-up question regarding exemplary readings, one ALA-accredited program cited a book and two cited book chapters. Like one of the NCATE programs, one ALA-accredited program cited an article that appeared in *School Library Research*: “Toward a Theory of Collaboration” (Montiel-Overall 2005). One ALA program identified the “Coteaching” issue of *Knowledge Quest* (Moreillon and Ballard 2012). Another ALA-accredited program cited a YouTube video “Highly Effective School Librarians Are Master Teachers” (Colorado State Library 2011).

In the follow-up questionnaire, one ALA-accredited program reported no specific textbook and pointed to the exemplary readings cited in question #2 of that program’s questionnaire. Unlike the NCATE-accredited schools, none of the ALA programs cited *Empowering Learners* as an exemplary text for the purpose of teaching the instructional partner role. Listed below are the textbooks and book chapters ALA-accredited programs cited.

### ALA Program Textbooks

Buzzeo, Toni. 2008a. *The Collaboration Handbook*. Columbus, OH: Linworth.

Fontichiaro, Kristin. ed. 2009. *21st-Century Learning in School Libraries*. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

Harada, Violet H., and Joan M. Yoshina. 2010. *Assessing for Learning: Librarians and Teachers as Partners*, 2nd ed. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

Moreillon, Judi. 2013b. *Coteaching Reading Comprehension Strategies in Elementary School Libraries: Maximizing Your Impact*. Chicago: ALA.

Moreillon, Judi. 2012. *Coteaching Reading Comprehension Strategies in Secondary School Libraries: Maximizing Your Impact*. Chicago: ALA.

### ALA Program Book Chapters

Donham, Jean. 2008. "Collaborative Planning." In *Enhancing Teaching and Learning: A Leadership Guide for School Library Media Specialists*, 2nd ed. by Jean Donham. New York: Neal-Schuman.

McGregor, Joy. 2003. "Collaboration and Leadership." In *Curriculum Connections through the Library* edited by Barbara K. Stripling and Sandra Hughes-Hassell. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

### Exemplary Assignment in ALA Programs

As in the NCATE-accredited programs, the collaborative lesson or unit plan was cited by all four of the study participants from ALA-accredited programs. In one ALA program, candidates conduct this assignment with classroom teachers in the field. In two ALA programs, this assignment involves collaboration with both a school librarian and a classroom teacher in the field; the lesson plan assignment for one of these ALA programs also includes collaboration with a small group of university classmates. One ALA program involves candidates in collaboration with partners in the online university classroom only.

All ALA programs noted that the lesson or unit plans described were to be based on curriculum standards and *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* (AASL 2007). One ALA-accredited program's description also mentioned the CCSS. One ALA program requires candidates to capture the lesson implementation in a K–12 classroom on video for the purposes of self- and instructor-assessment. In addition to the collaborative lesson plan assignment, one ALA-accredited program cited a second assignment as well—an in-service presentation collaboratively planned with a classroom teacher. Again, due to the lack of detail in some of the participants' responses, the specifics of the data are not as useful as the overall finding that study participants from ALA-accredited programs considered a collaborative lesson or unit plan to be an exemplary assignment focused on the school librarian's instructional partner role.

### Similarities and Differences between ALA- and NCATE-Accredited Programs

ALA- and NCATE-accredited programs differed in terms of the academic unit to which they belong; NCATE programs were in colleges of education, and ALA programs were within various academic units or were stand-alone schools within their universities. In ALA programs, pre-service school librarians are expected to take some of their coursework with candidates preparing for other types of professional library and information positions. Not surprisingly, ALA programs reported fewer courses dedicated solely to the preparation of school librarians. A greater percentage of readings and assignments related to the IP role were concentrated in the ALA-accredited program courses designed for school librarians only. In fact, an average of close to 40 percent of the readings and assignments in those courses reportedly concerned the IP role as compared with the NCATE schools where less than 30 percent of the assignments and less than 25 percent of the readings across all courses concerned the IP role. Course titles may indicate little about course content, but it was interesting that the ALA programs studied all had a

course title concerned with collaboration, curriculum, or the IP role while only two of the five NCATE programs offered a course titled as such.

Participants were asked, “Please rank the five roles of the school librarian in terms of the values of your school librarian preparation program: leader, instructional partner, information specialist, teacher, and program administrator.” ALA-accredited programs were more likely to rank the role of instructional partner first while NCATE-accredited schools gave a slight edge to the role of teacher and were more likely to rank the role of instructional partner as second. No program ranked the IP role last. On the other hand, the rankings of program administrator were never first yet ranged from 2 to 5. Looking across all of the programs, there seems to be agreement that the role of instructional partner is never last and the role of program administrator is never first. Beyond that there was little consensus across programs about the rankings of these roles.

## The Instructional Partner Role in Empowering Learners

These findings about the instructional partner role in the preparation of school librarians and particularly the lack of consensus related to the ranking of the roles in the various programs led us to wonder about how the role was treated in *Empowering Learners*. We conducted a content analysis of those guidelines looking for mentions of each of the roles. Table 5 shows the frequency and page numbers where each role was explicitly mentioned. Pages 16–18 contain the introduction and discussion of the roles, and multiple roles are mentioned in a single sentence on pages 19 and 46. Beyond that, few individual mentions of any one role were found.

Table 5. Frequency of role term mentions in *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (AASL 2009a).

Term	Number of Appearances	Page Numbers
Information Specialist	14	10, 16, 17, 18,19, 44, 46
Teacher	14	10, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 46
Instructional Partner	11	16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 26, 46
Leader	11	16, 17, 18, 19, 45, 47, 48
Program Administrator	8	16, 18, 46

*Empowering Learners* opens with this sentence, “The school library media specialist has the opportunity to be the essential member of the instructional team in each school” (AASL 2009a, 7), and throughout the document readers will find references to collaboration and partnering with teachers. In the discussion of roles, results from a survey that asked participants to rank the four roles from *Information Power* (teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator), the participants ranked instructional partner as the most important future role of

the school librarian. To this list of roles, *Empowering Learners* adds “leader.” Yet as one combs through the remainder of the document, the term “instructional partner” is rarely used except in sentences that group the roles together. For example in this discussion of leadership, *Empowering Learning* states, “Leading librarians embrace these challenges and opportunities to empower learning through their roles as *instructional partners*, information specialists, teachers, and program administrators” (AASL 2009a, 46).

It is also the case that a role in *Empowering Learners* may have been implied without a direct reference. For example, collaboration and partnering with classroom teachers are aspects of the instructional partner role and are given frequent mention throughout the chapters. Yet one has to conclude that it’s difficult for a reader to extract explicit guidance about any one of the roles, including that of instructional partner.

In chapter two readers will find the definition we adapted for this study: “School librarians co-design, co-implement, and co-evaluate interdisciplinary lessons and units of instruction that result in increased student learning” (AASL 2009a, 22). This chapter titled “Teaching for Learning” is clearly the chapter most concerned with the IP role, and yet the term “instructional partner” is found only twice, and one of those mentions is in a sidebar “Steps to the Instructional Partnership.” Yet throughout this chapter and the remainder of *Empowering Learners* numerous sentences include phrases about working collaboratively with classroom teachers or creating conditions conducive to collaboration. Other times references are made to partnering with teachers or being a member of a team. The discussion on page 20 is interesting because it seems to imply that in the IP role the school librarian collaborates with teachers and in the teacher role the librarian collaborates with students. To further the blurriness, *Empowering Learners* states, “All members of the learning community now share the roles of teacher, learner, and collaborative partner” (AASL 2009, 20).

*Empowering Learners* offers an interesting discussion of “The Changing Roles of the SLMS” (AASL 2009a, 16). Prior to a 2006 Vision Summit that brought together leading school librarians from across the country, AASL conducted a survey of school librarians and administrators who were both members and nonmembers of AASL. Respondents were asked to rank the four roles: teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator in order of importance to their current jobs and in order of importance to the “future success of school librarians.” In both rankings information specialist was second and program administrator was fourth (last). The roles of teacher and instructional partner were transposed. In the current rankings teacher was first, and instructional partner was third while in the future rankings, instructional partner moved to first and teacher to third. At the 2006 Vision Summit participants discussed the roles further and decided to add an “additional role” of leader. While the role of leader was not included in these rankings, the subsequent discussion in *Empowering Learners* presents and defines “leader” first with the remaining roles discussed in the order they were ranked for future importance, i.e., with instructional partner first after leader. As a result, many readers may infer that the role of leader is considered of first importance.

The addition of the “leader” role in *Empowering Learners* may have also muddied the water in terms of prioritizing the five roles. While some programs or courses may consider the leader role as distinct from the other four, others may address leadership through the other four AASL roles. As the content analysis of *Empowering Learners* shows, AASL does not provide a consistent message with regard to the relative importance of each role. The findings of this study about the rankings of the roles suggest a general lack of consensus about their relative importance. (An

obvious limitation of this study is that we do not know how various respondents operationalized any of the roles or how they may have found them implicated in each other.)

While the variety of exemplary readings and textbooks identified by participants provide an interesting reading list for the preparation of school librarians, we were struck by the lack of a common text or seminal work. Echoing the wide range of rankings for the roles of the school librarian, we found a lack of any shared knowledge, language, or definitions to be somewhat troubling. *Empowering Learner*, the professional guidelines in our field, or chapters within that book were considered “exemplary” for teaching about instructional partnerships by four of the five NCATE-accredited study participants and none of the ALA-accredited programs.

All programs featured the instructional partner role to some degree in many of their courses through readings and assignments. While courses with collaboration or curriculum in their titles were expected to include many readings and assignments concerning the IP role, we were curious about other courses such as Technology in the School Library or Reference and Information Resources for which study participants reported more than 50 percent of the readings as related to the IP role along with Information and Digital Literacies or Multimedia Resources and Services for which more than 50 percent of the assignments were reported to be related to the IP role.

The data regarding the lesson plan assignment was most compelling because it was a consistent response across all reporting institutions. A further study to compare this assignment design and the various ways in which pre-service candidates enact collaborative planning and teaching during their coursework could further illuminate graduate school librarian curricula. In addition, the practicum field placement course may be common across programs. The researchers did not examine data related to that course because it was not specifically asked for and not all programs provided it. Some participants did not provide sufficient information to enable assessment of that course in relationship to assignments, readings, or other course materials that were focused specifically on the instructional partner role. One could speculate that coplanning and/or coteaching is an essential component of the practicum, but that investigation was beyond the scope of this study.

## Study Limitations

Although the results of this study can provide beneficial data for educators of school librarians, the study’s methodology has limitations, which include the voluntary nature of participation, sample size, the self-report aspect of the data, and depth of course analysis provided by participants. The call for participation in this study, which extended from the ESLS meeting in June 2012 through the next year’s meeting at the ALA Annual Conference in June 2013 and included an invitation to ALISE School Library SIG members who attended the annual meeting in January 2013, netted only nine program participants. In addition, program curriculum and course materials may be under almost constant revision, and the data collected could, therefore, be only a snapshot of course offerings and programmatic support at the point in time when the responses were submitted by study participants.

This small sample size is a significant limitation of this study, since findings may not generalize to school librarian preparation programs at other universities and colleges. Some school librarian preparation programs may not have any courses designed solely for school librarian candidates. Others that have just one or two such courses may not have considered their participation in the



study useful to the researchers. A more robust response to the call for participation would have provided additional data and different results. Further studies are needed to determine if the findings from this study apply to other programs in the field.

The self-report aspect of the study is a limitation, but it can also be considered one of its strengths. The researchers determined that examining course syllabi would not yield the insider view that faculty could provide for their own courses and resources. However, when different members of the faculty, including adjuncts, teach specific school librarian-focused courses the readings, textbooks, and assignments may vary. Therefore, the data analyzed in this study may reflect the work of the faculty respondent only rather than consensus among all faculty that teach particular courses. In addition, various study participants provided various levels of detail in their responses. The lack of depth in some responses prevented researchers from making some comparisons, e.g., the collaborative lesson plan or unit. This was an expected result of the very nature of the open-ended questions on the follow-up questionnaire.

## Significance and Conclusion

This study adds knowledge in the field with regard to current practices in preparing school librarian candidates for the instructional partner role. It offers an exploratory review of LIS course offerings across a variety of school library preparation programs to determine the extent to which these programs prepare pre-service school librarians for the instructional partner role. This case study indicates that, in the case of the programs at these nine institutions, the collaborative lesson plan assignment may hold a key to a guaranteed learning experience for all pre-service school librarians. However, the study also shows that at these institutions there is very little overlap in the readings and textbooks with which pre-service candidates engage during their graduate coursework. It could be that school librarianship may lack seminal works that all or most LIS faculty can employ to help candidates develop this role; this case study may have uncovered a current gap in the professional literature. This gap may, in turn, be partially responsible for the extent to which this role is implemented in practice.

While this study offers only a glimpse into the variety of pre-service preparation programs, their plans of study, and, in particular, the relative emphasis on the instructional partner role across programs, it offers a starting point for future research in this area. This research should be of interest to educators of school librarians. The compilation of course materials and assignments provides specificity about preparation in pre-service school library programs for this critical role. Finally, school library preparation programs can use the results of this and future studies to self-assess and benchmark their own course content in relationship to the instructional partner role.

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## Appendix A: Program of Study Rankings Directions

From the recruitment email: After you read, sign, and return [the Consent to Participate Form] to us, we will ask you to email us a copy of your program of study that includes:

1. Your name and email contact information at the top of the program of study document.
2. For the courses listed on your document that are **targeted** to school librarian candidates, we are asking that you rate each one in terms of readings and collaborative course assignments. The rating scale follows.
3. We are also asking you to indicate “yes” or “no” if you are willing to participate in a follow-up questionnaire that will include questions to clarify your ratings in terms of readings and course assignments.

For the purposes of this study, educating for the instructional partner role is defined as “developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to jointly plan and implement standards-based lessons and units of study with classroom teachers and specialists.”

Rating Scale for courses targeted to school librarians:

Readings: percentage of course readings or viewings that promote the instructional partner role of school librarians:

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Assignments: percentage of assignments in which candidates work as collaborative partners or in a collaborative small group in order to complete an assignment

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

### Rating Scale Key:

0 = zero to 9% of the course readings/assignments address the instructional partner role  
 1 = 10 to 19% of the course readings/assignments address the instructional partner role  
 2 = 20 to 29% of the course readings/assignments address the instructional partner role  
 3 = 30 to 39% of the course readings/assignments address the instructional partner role  
 4 = 40 to 49% of the course readings/assignments address the instructional partner role  
 5 = 50 to 59% of the course readings/assignments address the instructional partner role  
 6 = 60 to 69% of the course readings/assignments address the instructional partner role  
 7 = 70 to 79% of the course readings/assignments address the instructional partner role  
 8 = 80 to 89% of the course readings/assignments address the instructional partner role  
 9 = 90 to 99% of the course readings/assignments address the instructional partner role  
 10 = ALL of the course readings/assignments address the instructional partner role

**Note:** In an ALA-accredited program, for example, school librarian candidates may take many courses that are designed for librarians serving in all types of library settings. Do not include these courses in your ratings. Only include courses **designed for school librarian candidates**.

Please see the attached sample.

## Appendix B: Follow-up Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to clarify the ratings and gather more specific information about educating for the instructional partner role.

1. Please rank the five roles of the school librarian in terms of the values of your school librarian preparation program with #1 being the most important and #5 being the least important: leader, instructional partner, information specialist, teacher, and program administrator.
2. Please give an example of an exemplary reading (textbook, textbook chapter, article, or other) focused on instructional partnerships.
3. Please give an example of an exemplary assignment focused on instructional partnerships.
4. Which textbook(s) do you use in your program that focuses specifically on librarians serving in the instructional partner role?

Thank you for your participation.

### Cite This Article

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