



Assimilation or Humiliation? An Analysis of Professional Identities after Critical Events in the Workplace

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Abstract

Many studies have analyzed the occupational socialization of public school educators, including principals and school teachers; however, very few studies have documented or synthesized the experience of novice school librarians. This study contributes to the understanding of novice school librarians' professional identities by analyzing their critical events in the workplace. Participants' critical events were identified using a modified version of the narrative inquiry tool Mystery. After an examination of three novice school librarians' critical event narratives, this paper explores the significance of those critical events on participants' professional identity formation. Common findings relate to professional impact, professional respect, and professional confidence.

Introduction

Formation of professional identity plays a critical role in the evolution of the school librarian. According to Karen Hammerness, Linda Darling-Hammond, and John Bransford, developing a professional identity is an "...important part of securing [educators'] commitment to their work and adherence to professional norms. Identities...shape dispositions, where ...effort [is placed], whether and how [novices] seek out professional development opportunities, and what obligations they see as intrinsic to their role" (2005, 383–4). Consequently, professional identity not only defines educators' practice, it also relates to their dedication to their profession. For the purposes of this paper, the terms "professional identity formation" and "evolving professional identity" are used synonymously.

Many believe that becoming an educator occurs when a person receives academic credentials. People with this perspective see identity formation as a seamless transition from academia to employment (Britzman 2003). However, Kathy Carter and Walter Doyle have emphasized that the process of becoming an educator occurs well into the first years of teaching. To Carter and Doyle "...becoming a teacher means (a) transforming an identity, (b) adapting personal understandings and ideals to institutional realities, and (c) deciding how to express one's self in classroom activity" (1996, 139).

Likewise, opinions differ about when an individual becomes a librarian. Although the American Library Association (1991) declares that individuals cannot be librarians without a Master's degree in library and/or information studies, not all public and independent schools require their librarians to hold (or earn) a Master's degree. With or without the library profession's credentials, feelings of loneliness, self-doubt, and defeat can make the process of becoming a librarian appear distant—if not impossible—for some people.

Professional identity formation is a dynamic process that cannot be expected to productively occur on its own (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009). Unlike other novice librarians who have mentors working with them at a public or academic library reference desk or teachers who have mentors working in the classrooms next door, most novice school librarians do not have many opportunities to cultivate their professional identities beyond observing and/or interning during their Master's degree studies. Formal, customized professional development systems within schools rarely exist for school librarians, perhaps because there are so few in a school or school system. Even fewer people with the knowledge and ability to mentor school librarians are in positions such as a school district's director of library services or director of innovation.

This reality may contribute to novice school librarians' feeling isolated and "different" from others in their school communities (Hartzell 2002). Instead of reaching out to mentors who are classroom teachers and, therefore, may not understand the work school librarians do, many novice school librarians internalize their professional struggles. This internalization affects school librarians' professional identity and, ultimately, their ability to emerge as school leaders and curriculum experts in an era when, because of tight budgets and a wealth of online resources, administrators are closely looking at whether school librarians are needed.

The transition from novice to expert is not the same for all novice teachers (Britzman 2003) or novice librarians. For example, a large number of school librarians have served in K–12 schools as teachers and have been socialized into the culture (Shannon 2008). However, some school librarians enter the profession from fields other than education. These novice school librarians do not have previous socialization experiences in K–12 schools or established identities as educators on which to call. Even so, these novice school librarians are expected by other educators within the school and within the profession to fill leadership roles in areas of instructional design, pedagogy, and technology (Johnston 2012). Without mentors inside their schools who understand the nature of their work, many novice school librarians begin their careers feeling different from other educators—or worse, feeling misunderstood. Even more serious, some school librarians begin their occupational socialization trying to prove that their work matters. In these emotionally charged environments (Nias 1996), many novice school librarians suppress their professional struggles.

Much literature focuses on the professional identities of other school professionals (specifically, administrators and classroom teachers), but few studies look at the evolving identities of school librarians. One qualitative study of novice school librarians focused on participants' identity formation (Sandford 2013). However, Deborah W. Sandford's novice school librarian participants had a wealth of professional experiences working in schools as classroom teachers or in other instructional roles. Thus, the experiences of Sandford's study participants did not always represent those of "true" novices. Sandford examined how four school librarians early in their librarian careers described their professional identities and how their personal histories influenced their construction of professional identities. While Sandford's participants note some "lasting impressions" from their experiences as students with librarians in K–12 schools (2013,

224), these experiences are not significant influences. Instead, the participants noted that their observations in their adulthood of librarians have had the greatest influence on their understanding of school librarianship.

In addition, insufficient scholarship exists about the relationship between the evolving identity of novice school librarians and professional critical events. According to Leonard Webster and Patricie Mertova (2007), critical events are recognized by the following characteristics: (1) the author/storyteller admits a change of understanding or worldview after the event occurs; (2) the event positively or negatively affects the author's/storyteller's work performance; and (3) the event incorporates a physical or social risk, traumatic experience, or overt public attention. Even exploring the emotional dimension of school librarianship is rare, despite the significance emotions have in building positive professional identities for public school educators (Kelchtermans 1996; Intrator 2006; Palmer 2007). In fact, Yvonne Gold (1996) has articulated the importance of the first year of teaching in shaping the identities of educators. The critical events of novice teachers—and the ways in which the novices feel about and respond to these events—leave an imprint in their hearts and minds. Later, during similar moments, novice teachers call on previous memories and apply similar feelings, actions, and ways of thinking. If the imprinting is negative in the first year, educators find it difficult to break the cycle of negative thinking and negative actions and reactions.

Ultimately, focusing on critical events reveals a rarely acknowledged—and even less frequently discussed—emotional dimension of school librarianship. This avoidance of the emotional aspect of the occupation may be explained by the library profession's need to overcorrect stereotypes related to the occupation's feminization or to maintain and/or prove the “science” in library science.

Occupational socialization and identity formation for educators is full of tension (Measor 1985). Educators are at odds with themselves as they wrestle to reconcile their academic training and their philosophies with the reality of school environments, with the people around them, and/or with the society in which the educators live. Critical events put teachers out of balance and “caus[e] individuals to reorganize, strengthen, or alter their system of thinking,” knowledge, beliefs, or feelings (Gomez, Black, and Allen 2007, 2109).

Theoretical Framework

Michael W. Apple (1982, 1986) examined the labor structures established within public schools and used a Marxist lens to identify the class structures that defined the teaching profession. Based on educators' complex relationship to labor and the means of production, Apple classified public school educators by two classes: the petty bourgeoisie and the working class. The petty bourgeoisie, as workers, have specialized skills. They function as supervisors guiding the working class to produce maximum value.

Marxist theory contrasts the petty bourgeoisie with the working class. Broadly defined, working-class jobs include blue-collar work, service professionals, and other white-collar work. Ultimately, the physical or mental labor of the working class enables others to profit.

Teachers' and librarians' university education could situate them firmly in the petty bourgeoisie, but the present-day structure of schools often positions educators in the working class. Residing in multiple classes, public school educators possess “contradictory interests” (Apple 1986, 32).

These contradictory interests, according to Apple, lead educators to produce contradictory actions (1986). For example, when educators oppose hegemonic ideologies and use their specialized skills, they are living out their petty bourgeoisie identities. However, when educators reproduce the cultural assumptions that guide their labor processes and embrace the scripted curriculum, they are embracing their working-class identities (Apple 1982).

Defining these moments of reproduction as losses, Apple asked how “...teachers’ lived culture [could] be reorganized [without] reproducing...elements [of a] patriarchal domain” (1986, 52). While a labor orientation for educators may not overtly reveal concerns for school librarians’ identities, there are implications for school structures that foster “librarian as check-out clerk” working-class identities versus “librarian as educator” or “school leader” petty bourgeoisie identities.

Purpose and Methods

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to contribute to the understanding of novice school librarians’ professional identity by studying their critical events (hereby referred to as “CE”) in the workplace. If, as Gold (1996) has argued, critical events in early years of educators’ careers leave imprints and, ultimately, forecast future feelings, actions, and ways of thinking for teachers, there is a great need for scholars and educators of school librarians to understand how this theory applies to school librarians—if it does apply.

This study examined three novice school librarians’ CE narratives and explored the perceived influence the CEs had on their evolving identities. For the purposes of this study “novice status” was considered as applying to school librarians with fewer than five years of experience. The following research questions guided the study.

- How do CEs create and/or shape professional identities of novice school librarians (if at all)?
- What forces do school librarians perceive affect or control their professional identities?

Narrative Research Methods

For this study, I selected narrative research methods from the qualitative tradition, and the research design used descriptive multiple-case studies (Yin 2009). For decades narrative inquiry has been used as a research methodology to understand the work of teachers (Connelly and Clandinin 1990; Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999; Lyons and LaBoskey 2002). Narrative inquiry has the potential to benefit participants for a variety of reasons, including the following: the written stories demonstrate the emotional complexities around the work of educators; and the participants recall critical events from the past, articulate and analyze events as they are remembered, and determine how (and whether) the events inform their future practice (Carr 1986; Webster and Mertova 2007). Because of these benefits, among others, researchers and K–12 schools have used autobiographical narrative inquiry as a professional development tool for educators.

Specifically, I used a variation of the narrative inquiry tool *Mystory* (Denzin 2003; Ulmer 1989) in an attempt to understand the novice school librarians' CEs. Gregory L. Ulmer (1989, 1994) developed the concept of *Mystory* out of his frustration for traditional academic writing that focused on expressing absolute truth. He designed these electronic unconventional texts to connect and, ultimately, synthesize disparate discourses and the notion of truth. These discourses included: personal discourses using autobiography, popular discourses derived from oral history or from local or national culture, and academic discourses from experts. Providing no examples or models to aid his students' exploration, Ulmer intended for *Mystories* to be used to explore the arts, literature, and language as a learner instead of as an expert. *Mystory* involves each participant's creating a single autobiographical narrative that defines a turning point or a crisis, beginning with the "sting of memory" (Denzin 2014, 32). The written narratives are called "critical event narratives." After dramatically describing the critical event in a written text and integrating voices that define the experience, each participant performs the interactive narrative in front of an audience. In concert together, both participant and audience reveal oppression found in the *Mystory* and envision a more hopeful future in systems and/or relationships.

For the purposes of this study, I used a series of questions to facilitate a discussion at the performance between the audience and the participants about the participants' critical events. Audiences were invited to participate in the creation or recreation of the *Mystory's* meaning. From this discussion, the participants recognized the cultural representations and voices that defined the critical event. After the performance, the participant produced another written text for the purpose of reflecting on the deconstruction of the critical event narrative and lessons learned. I supplemented *Mystory* with semi-structured interviews both before and after the writing of the *Mystory*.

Participants

School librarians were invited to participate in the study via email based on their:

- (1) previous student status in a school library certification specialization cohort within a library science graduate program at the same U.S. midwestern university; this cohort, designed for people without teaching licenses, was open to approximately ten people a year;
- (2) having an undergraduate degree in something other than education;
- (3) interest in professional development;
- (4) novice status as secondary public school librarians; and
- (5) experiencing a CE after they had received librarian status. Librarian status could have been achieved in one of two ways: (1) by the American Library Association's (1991) definition of becoming a librarian through earning a Master's degree in library science, or (2) by the public school job title under which they were hired. For example, one participant received librarian credentials as defined by the American Library Association and was the only librarian in her school, but for monetary reasons was classified by the school as a library clerk. Two participants held librarian status by the American Library Association's definition and the school's job title. In this paper the term "school librarian" is applied to all participants because all identified with this title based on their achievement of librarian status in at least one of the two ways described above. The

timeline of participants' experiences and my interviews with them are represented in table 1.

Table 1

Participant	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year Four*
Ginger	Accepted a school librarian job on the Navajo reservation while still pursuing her M.L.S.	Student-taught outside the reservation. Completed M.L.S. Returned to the Navajo reservation as a certified school librarian. Critical event occurred. Resigned from school.	Accepted a new school librarian post. Agreed to participate in the study. Interview #1. Wrote and performed CE narrative. Wrote reflective text. Interview #2. Interview #3.	Interview #4. Interview #5. Interview #6.
Lucy	Accepted school librarian job on East Coast after receiving her M.L.S. Critical event occurred. Agreed to participate in the study. Wrote CE narrative. Interview #1. Performed CE narrative. Interview #2.	Interview #3. Wrote reflective text. Interview #4. Resigned from school.	Interview #5.	Interview #6.
Izzie	Accepted library position in Midwest after receiving her M.L.S.	Wrote CE narrative. Interview #1. Performed CE narrative.	Interview #4.	

	Critical event occurred. Agreed to participate in the study.	Wrote reflective text. Interview #2. Interview #3.		
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* Some participants completed interviews at a faster pace; thus, deeming interviews five and six unnecessary.

To study in depth the evolving nature of professional identities, the number of participants remained small (Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett 2008; Patton 2002; Miles and Huberman 1994). According to Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Barbara Laslett, one participant's narrative can produce rich detail, and large numbers of participants may not allow for an in-depth focus on each participant's narrative (2008).

Data Collection Process

Overview

Mystories can begin with a prompt. For my participants, I used the following: *Explain an existential crisis, significant turning point, or noteworthy experience in life.* I specifically asked the three participants to narrow their CEs to something related to their professional work inside school libraries. After participants' narratives were written, they performed their CE narratives to their self-selected audiences. After their individual performances, the participants wrote reflective texts that focused on the performance/deconstruction of their CE narrative. Upon receiving their reflections, I conducted a number of follow-up interviews with each participant to better understand the identity claims that surfaced in the narrative, at the performance, and in the written reflective text. The interviews took place between six months and three years after the novice school librarians' CE. While the interview questions covered a number of topics related to participants' occupational socialization, the portion of these interviews about participants' CEs ranged from fifteen minutes to an hour and a half. Each of the cases is summarized below with the participants' self-identified critical events in bold typeface. Participants were given the following pseudonyms: Ginger, Lucy, and Izzie and their associated schools/locations are also pseudonyms.

Case Study #1: Ginger: School Librarian, Not the Kinko's Copy Girl

Administrators hired Ginger as a school librarian (as defined by her job title and job description) at Red Rock High School (RRHS) on the Navajo reservation; at the time, she was only two courses away from earning her Master's degree in library science. Even after feeling openly devalued for her Anglo identity, Ginger attempted to change the reading and research culture of RRHS. The school had never before employed a school librarian; thus, administrators and other faculty and staff members expected Ginger to perform the clerical duties of others who previously monitored the library. Ginger placed significant emphasis on her work as an instructional leader, a technology-based instructional design consultant, and a curriculum collaborator. Reluctantly, she also performed the clerical duties that school administrators expected of her. However, when the technology staff decided that she would manage the large-

format printer but receive no training on how to use it, **Ginger addressed her concerns with her administrator. After feeling silenced and, ultimately, ignored by her administrator,** Ginger resigned from her position. She believed she was a “school librarian, not the Kinko’s copy girl” (March 29, 2012).

Case Study #2 Lucy: School Librarian, Not Interior Decorator

Lucy was hired as a credentialed school librarian, as defined by her job description and her Master’s degree in library science, at Prescott High School on the East Coast. She was hired because the school was seeking reaccreditation and needed a school librarian in place before the accreditation review. In spite of Lucy’s desire to teach information-literacy skills and promote recreational reading, the state of the print collection was outdated, disorganized, and dusty. Furthermore, the school had allocated no budget to improve it. Lucy was in the middle of organizing and weeding the book collection to improve book access for students, and she had a few piles of books stacked on the shelves and the floor. Some piles were books that needed to be reshelfed in alternative locations; some piles were books to be weeded. At the same time, a school board meeting took place in the library. The day after the meeting, Lucy was summoned to her superintendent’s office. There, **the superintendent directed Lucy to remove the piles of books from the library and redecorate the library before every school board meeting in the future.** The rest of the year, before every school board meeting, the superintendent’s secretary and her principal reminded Lucy to redecorate. Without a budget, Lucy felt obligated to invest her own funds to decorate the library. She took time away from her professional goals to create an aesthetically pleasing setting. Ultimately, Lucy resigned from her position. She believed she was a school librarian, not an interior decorator.

Case Study #3: Izzie: School Librarian, Not Seventh-Grade Girlfriend

The administrators at Perry Grove High School hired Izzie as the sole person responsible for all library services. Although Izzie self-identified as a school librarian based on her Master’s degree in library science, for an entire year her title was library clerk; all the while, she performed the work of the school librarian as she had been taught during graduate school. She worked under the assumption that her principal would reinstate the school librarian position by the next year, and she would be first in line for the job. Izzie regularly advocated for the library and the school librarian position with the administrator, and she collaborated with teachers on research lessons. At the end of the year, **she forced her principal to make a decision about the upcoming school year: reinstate the librarian position to keep her doing her good work or leave the position as a clerical one to get rid of her. When he avoided making a decision and continued to string her along,** she felt like she was in a romantic middle school relationship. Finally realizing that her administrator intended for her to continue receiving clerical pay, Izzie immediately packed her belongings. She believed she was a school librarian, not a seventh-grade girlfriend.

Data Analysis

Because the research was framed around the CEs of novice school librarians for the purpose of understanding their occupational identity formation, an adapted version of Critical Events Analysis was used as the primary technique to synthesize the data (Webster and Mertova 2007).

According to Webster and Mertova (2007) there are four stages of Critical Events Analysis: (1) Analysis of Criticality; (2) Event Structure Analysis; (3) Identity Analysis; and (4) Modified Content Analysis. The focus of this paper is the third stage.

Stage three of Critical Events Analysis fuses the events of the narrative with the motivations and intentions of the narrator. This fusion allows the analysis to not only focus on what happened in the story, but also to give insight on the character and nature of the storyteller. Building on Yi-Ping Huang and Phil Carspecken's theory of identity claims, I read through the full CE narrative that each participant wrote and performed (2013, 264). Then, I identified the parts of the narrative that revealed a claim about the school librarian's identity and synthesized a statement of the claim. For example, one participant's narrative stated: "I came out of graduate school with the ambition to conquer the school librarian world..." to which the following identity claim was ascribed: *I am professionally ambitious*.

When repetition or close similarities occurred with identity claims, the assigned claims were edited to create broader identity categories. For example, one narrative revealed the following identity claims: *I want to be supported as a teacher* and *I want to be supported as a school leader*. These two claims were assigned the broader category: *I want to be supported*. Finally, I identified each claim on a continuum by labeling it "explicit," "implicit," or "tacit."

After the identity claims were identified and categorized, the respondent validation was conducted by showing the participants the synthesized identity claims. The participants either strongly identified with or identified with the majority of the identity claims. Four identity claims were disputed by participants. I explained to the participants what specific portion of the narrative, performance transcript, and/or interview transcript led to the identity claim category. After the discussions, one participant continued to challenge one assigned identity claim, and she used examples and data from her narrative to defend her stance. Ultimately, the challenged identity claim was not included in the analysis.

After the completion of the participants' identity claims and subsequent checks by participants, I reviewed all identity claims to determine if commonalities and/or divergences emerged from the data. Because a few participants' identity claims were related but not identical word-for-word, a content analysis was conducted to pair similar identity claims into related thematic categories.

Findings

Introduction

The participants' identity claims, as revealed throughout their CE narratives, are categorized in Appendix B. Next to each claim is a number that indicates the number of times the participants' narrative explicitly, implicitly, or tacitly claimed it. While participants' narratives were markedly different, four related identity claims emerged in two or more cases: (1) identity claims related to professional impact; (2) identity claims related to professional respect; (3) identity claims related to leadership; and (4) identity claims related to professional confidence.

First, identity claims related to professional impact appeared in both Ginger's and Izzie's CE narratives. In Ginger's narrative, she presented herself as someone of worth who was equipped to make a difference in her school. She articulated the people she could affect: students, teachers, and all the people in the world. Her narrative also pointed to places and ways she ambitiously

made a difference through her work. After the CE, Ginger continued to believe that she could and would make a difference in her professional life—but in a different school. Before Izzie's CE, she too believed she could make a difference in schools as a visionary school librarian. But she quickly altered this identity claim, when, after her CE, Izzie lost confidence in her ability to impact others.

Second, in their CE narratives Ginger and Lucy both expressed identity claims related to respect. In her narrative, Ginger emerged as someone who recognized that she deserved professional respect; this identity claim occurred frequently throughout her narrative. However, in spite of her own recognition of what she deserved, her narrative describes how, on multiple occasions, she did not receive the professional respect she was due from teachers, technology staff, administration, or community members. In contrast, Lucy never had an identity claim that she deserved professional respect. However, Lucy's narrative often recognized the lack of respect that clerical staff, some teachers, and administrators had for her professional work. They clearly did not value it.

Third, all three participants' narratives discussed their beliefs about administrators as leaders after their CEs. For both Ginger and Lucy, their CEs taught them that they should question authority privately. Izzie's narrative further articulated distrust by claiming that as a school librarian, she could no longer trust people in leadership. She confided,

It [the CE] was devastating...It [proved that it] doesn't matter how good of a job I do. It makes no difference. I can bust my ass all year. Do everything just right. Do advocacy. Collaborate with teachers. I can do all of these things, all the textbook things you're supposed to do to be a good school librarian... It doesn't matter... It makes no difference! It's all political. I don't want to have my professional career be dependent upon politics. And that's what it is. That's absolutely what it is in a lot of places. And that just killed me... So, I think [I experienced] the death of that idea... that you're rewarded [by your administrator] for good work. No! There are [teachers at PGHS] who are terrible... Beyond terrible! And they keep their jobs! (November 20, 2012)

Izzie lost respect for school leaders when she realized the truth about her own. Her principal chose to not reinstate the school's librarian position, even though he appeared to have complete control over how the high school distributed the personnel budget. Yet, he never took responsibility for his decision. He continued to blame the district administration.

Fourth, after their CEs, Lucy and Izzie expressed numerous times throughout their narratives that they were not confident. While Lucy experienced some confidence development during student-teaching/graduate school library internship, she was rarely afforded confidence-building opportunities in her first year as a school librarian. She desired instructional feedback; she wanted encouragement and professional mentoring. Furthermore, she continued to struggle with professional confidence as a novice school librarian more than a year after her CE. Izzie, on the other hand, identified as a confident professional before her CE. Even though she experienced a great deal of professional uncertainty related to her library school professor's harsh and personal criticism, she volunteered in a local school for enough hours that she believed she knew how to operate a school library. Ultimately, she believed she could operate it a great deal better than the previous school librarian. After her CE, Izzie lost and struggled to regain her professional confidence.

During post-performance interviews, all participants explained the changes and/or transformation in their professional identities and what or whom they believed caused the changes. Appendix C arranges and labels these shifts for each participant.

Locus of Control: Ginger

Ginger mostly pointed to an external locus of control responsible for the changes in her professional identity (see Appendix C, table C-1). She feared that if she returned to an abusive work environment she would struggle with the same concerns and probably take on a professional identity similar to the one she had at Red Rock. “It would repeat itself,” she said knowingly. “I’d have to be stronger” (December 18, 2012). While Ginger saw her CE as powerful enough to impel her to resign, the CE was not powerful enough to change who she would be in another stressful work environment.

Locus of Control: Lucy

In spite of Lucy’s faculty status, Lucy’s superiors treated her—the token librarian—as clerical staff on numerous occasions, treatment that was further enforced by other clerical staff. This experience led her to compromise to keep her job. Even though Lucy never desired to be a change agent, the Prescott administrators dismissed her early attempts to create a school library program because there was no library budget. In Lucy’s mind, without a budget there could be no library program. What she was unable to see was that the school corporation had invested in the greatest resource for a library program: a certified school librarian. Their reasons for doing so did not nullify their lack of financial support. In some ways, it was not the external forces that created Lucy’s greatest occupational vulnerability; rather, it was her internal desire to please others, to be what her superiors told her to be. Instead of being accountable to herself first, she allowed the school administrators to be responsible for what she would value and how she would spend her time. Their values became her values. She explained,

I receive far more attention about changing posters and displaying student work than any other part of my job. It has forced me to refocus my efforts from projects that I believe in as a professional to tasks I need to complete to keep in my superior’s good graces, to keep a job. (April 25, 2012)

Lucy’s adoption of her administrators’ values came at a great cost. In the process of her conformity, Lucy was able to keep her job. But conforming forced her to act in ways that were in direct opposition to her core beliefs about school libraries and teaching. Furthermore, Lucy resisted recognizing any modifications she made to her professional identity; instead, to her, a new school culture and a new administrator made the difference in her professional identity (see Appendix C, table C-2). Lucy pointed to the external shift from a program that was not established (Prescott) to one that was highly functioning. Her new school’s culture had high expectations of what children could find in the school library, which led to greater respect for her role as a librarian. She postponed the work involved in self-improvement to “one day” in the future (May 25, 2012). Thus, Lucy viewed an external locus of control as responsible for the shift in her professional identity.

Locus of Control: Izzie

Two years after her CE, Izzie discussed the transformation in her identity claims and to whom she attributed the shift in her professional identity (see Appendix C, table C-3). Izzie claimed to have recovered many of the self-affirming identity claims that she made before her CE. While the CE did temporarily negate some of the most positive characteristics of her professional identity, the passing of time and physical distance from her employer allowed her to restore much of her original identity. Even though she continued to work for the same school district, Izzie's new job out of the library environment was instrumental to her healing process.

Izzie accepted the majority of the responsibility for the deterioration of self-perception that affected her professional identity. The one identity claim that Izzie found difficult to overcome entirely on her own related to her lack of confidence. This identity claim obviously did not simply emerge at the moment of the CE; instead, it was a facet of her identity that Izzie has fought for nearly twenty years. Dependent on the praise of others, Izzie noticed that her confidence level increased. She reflected,

I am more confident about how I performed in my first professional job at PGHS. Just because I was not beloved by the principal, it doesn't mean that I'm not good at being a librarian. [Although her job title was library clerk, Izzie self-identified as a school librarian based on her Master's degree in library science.] But, I needed other people saying that there wasn't anything more I could have done to let myself off the hook. I got good feedback from others, and I did a good job. I believe I can make a library functional, and I left the school ultimately saying that I was worth more than \$8.35 per hour. That's confidence, right? (May 16, 2013)

Perhaps because of Izzie's long-term struggle with confidence, she could change her self-perception only with the help of other people. They had to tell her what they saw in her CE, and some even pointedly addressed the errors in her thinking.

Discussion

Introduction

The first question this study explored was whether CEs created and/or shaped the professional identities of novice school librarians. As previously described, four identity claims emerged as commonalities in the findings: (1) identity claims related to professional impact; (2) identity claims related to professional respect; (3) identity claims related to leadership; (4) identity claims related to professional confidence.

Professional Impact

Preparation programs train pre-service school librarians to administer twenty-first-century libraries and serve as instructional leaders (Church 2011). University program supervisors work diligently to coordinate positive internships for school librarian candidates. During internships, librarians-in-training can participate in library programs that are positively contributing to their school communities. Prepared by their academic work and internships, novice school librarians are often excited and anxious to make an impact in their first library. However, these case studies

reveal that when novice school librarians accept positions in school libraries that have been neglected for years or decades, it can be difficult for librarians to alter the systems and structures needed to impact educational settings. When the novice school librarians could not get the respect they expected or create the programs they envisioned, their spirits were crushed by CEs in the workplace.

Moreover, when novices experience CEs that affect their identities as capable contributors to the educational environment, according to Gold (1996) they may no longer have the drive to attempt to educate or stimulate others for the remainder of their careers. This outcome could have detrimental effects on a library program, student learning, and other educators' beliefs about the value of school librarians. Consequently, such experiences could severely affect the emotional state of the school librarians, especially if they have a difficult time separating themselves from their work.

Professional Respect

Participants in this study were divided in their beliefs about professional respect. Ginger thought she deserved it; however, she struggled to receive it from staff, faculty, and administrators. For Ginger this challenge had two parts: (1) her "outsider" status and (2) the school's history with a "librarian" who was a clerk without library school or teacher training. When Ginger could not shift the majority perceptions about her role as a librarian (from clerk to teacher) in the first two years, she resigned. She did not believe that she could change the culture of her school related to school librarianship, so she looked for a new position where the path was already paved for a twenty-first-century school librarian. However, if the only schools at which novices seek employment are ones with highly developed positive perceptions of school librarians and libraries, then it is possible that a great number of school libraries would never undergo a much-needed transformation into the current century. With a professional orientation toward social justice grounded in service, novices and expert librarians should be prepared for the difficult work of changing faculty perceptions of the library/librarian and altering school structures that hinder progress and innovation.

In contrast, Lucy never expressed a need for professional respect. Instead, because she needed a job, she answered the phones in the front office, she took orders from the office staff in regards to her daily schedule, and she redecorated the library on a regular basis for school board meetings. However, without the belief that one deserves respect, it is difficult to ever receive it. For a school librarian who defines or redefines herself as others see her, a social and psychological concept called the "looking-glass self," she may never feel professionally respected or deserving of it.

Thus, it would be difficult to earn professional status; it would also be difficult to defend the work of school librarians or the value of school libraries. In an educational era that greatly needs advocacy for and by school librarians, this nullification of respect could have severe consequences for school librarians and their students. These consequences could include replacing librarians with clerks or eliminating positions entirely.

Perceptions of School Leadership

These case studies reveal that school librarians invested various amounts of time in building their relationships with their administrators. However, none of them saw a positive return on their investments. Participants' CEs shifted their thinking about administrators as potential partners to considering administrators to be adversaries. In professional settings, novices tend to avoid people who cannot be trusted. Avoidance, however, nearly guarantees ineffective relationships, a circumstance that hinders the school librarians' abilities to emerge as educational partners or leaders. Moreover, this distrust toward administrators might prevent school librarians from ever approaching principals to discuss instruction, programs, or program needs. Ultimately, this shift to seeing administrators as adversaries occurred in all three case studies.

Professional Confidence

Coursework in library school as well as internship opportunities are avenues in which pre-service librarians should build professional confidence. However, first-year socialization experiences partnered with CEs can deplete a novice librarian's confidence bank. Without professional confidence, it is difficult to experiment with new technologies or teaching styles. Lessons can grow outdated and novice librarians can be socialized by mentor teachers who give advice for the library to be the way it has always been; philosophies and professional practices learned in library school can be ignored. A lack of confidence can accelerate negative self-fulfilling prophecies and damage school librarians' outlooks and, ultimately, careers.

The conflicting assumptions about the nature of school librarians' work mirror how Apple (1986) defines the work of educators. The clerical support staff role that administrators assigned to them situated the participants with working-class identities. This identity was in direct conflict with the professional identity that resided in the petty bourgeoisie class for which their preparation programs and internship experiences prepared them. According to Apple, educators' contradictory statuses cause them to produce contradictory actions (1986). Apple's theory contends that when educators embrace working-class identities, they consequently reproduce the cultural myths or assumptions that guide their labor practices (1982).

In the cases of Ginger and Izzie, both librarians worked to balance their petty bourgeoisie status with their working-class status. Both experienced a great deal of autonomy in their positions; thus, they were able to silently prioritize the professional work identified with petty bourgeoisie status. However, when both of their administrators made it clear that the future of their work and status—ultimately through their treatment, pay, and/or job title—would necessarily be clerical with working-class status, both Ginger and Izzie immediately resigned from their positions. Both refused to assume a professional identity of “school librarian as a clerical position,” even though their administrators demanded that a clerical identity should guide their labor processes. The situations in which their administrators made these demands became the CEs about which Ginger and Izzie wrote their narratives.

This commonality between their CEs was not by chance. Their occupational socialization in graduate school strongly ensconced them in the petty bourgeoisie. They refused work that formally placed them in any other class, even if they needed a paycheck.

Ginger and Izzie also shared a strong desire to change the minds of others about the work and value of school librarians, a circumstance that could explain their refusals to be typecast as

clerical workers. Perhaps when their administrators explicitly demanded that they each adopt a clerical role within the school, they realized their incapacity to change their present workplace within the timeline they envisioned (a one- to two-year period). Instead, their administrators' demands became symbols of dead-end jobs. Both Ginger and Izzie quickly terminated their employment at their respective schools, and then immediately looked for and found different work.

Locus of Control

The second question this study explored was about the forces school librarians perceive as impacting or controlling their professional identities. For the three participants in this study, there was not consensus about what controlled their professional identities (see Appendix C). While Ginger and Lucy saw their CEs as powerful enough to change their beliefs about the library profession and their place within it, the CEs were not influential enough to make significant personal changes. Both pointed to an external locus of control, and they looked for different school library positions in which the external controls were more favorable to school librarians as teachers and collaborators. While Izzie saw her CE as powerful enough to alter her opinions about the library profession, she pointed to an internal locus of control as ultimately determining who she was as a professional. Continuing to allow external forces to create or re-create the identities of school librarians places a great deal of power in the hands of people who have not been trained as librarians.

Recommendations to Improve Professional Identities

Introduction

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) has in recent years placed a greater emphasis on advocacy on behalf of school librarians. School librarian lobbyists work to gain support from local and national politicians. AASL has promoted exclusive use of the historic job title, and slowly professionals are embracing the historic name of "school librarian." AASL is also working toward consistent expectations for the job description of school librarians. However, this study reveals that in three settings the status of a school librarian's position and her ensuing job security remain threatened.

Rethinking School Librarian Education

As described earlier, the process of forming professional identities in the field of education is not expected to occur magically through informal/formal observations and professional coursework, or on receiving a graduate degree (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009). To add to the complexity of identity formation, as Gary Hartzell (2002) has pointed out, feeling isolated and different may slow down or hinder the process of becoming an effective school librarian. School librarians' isolation complicates their decision-making process on "how to express [them]selves" in their role, a key indicator of an established professional identity (Carter and Doyle 1996, 139).

A common path to school librarianship is attending library school after having received a degree in education, having a teaching career, and, therefore, having already established a professional identity as an educator (Shannon 2008; Carter and Doyle 1996). These common professional

experiences could potentially allow novice school librarians to feel more prepared for their work in schools as teaching librarians and perhaps their professional identities should, in turn, be more stable. However, the novice school librarians in this study all lacked undergraduate coursework in education and formal positions as classroom teachers. They claimed that they were not prepared for their roles as school librarians through informal/formal observations or professional coursework. While this is a frequent complaint that educators have about their academic preparation programs, the perceived lack of preparation for the school librarians in this study could be because the participants did not have typical educational backgrounds. It is difficult to imagine that the foundation their library science program offered, namely twelve to fifteen credit hours in education followed by a brief student-teaching experience, could solidly prepare school librarians—and certainly not instructional leaders or instructional designers.

If library science programs offer alternative paths to librarianship, they have a responsibility to their students and to the library profession to ensure that preservice school librarians have had opportunities to form strong professional identities that can sustain them through their early career CEs. Among the many approaches include: (1) designing mentoring programs with vetted mentors who provide novices with experiences to negotiate and contribute to school culture (this is explained further below); (2) providing active, preservice librarianship experiences to collaborate with school personnel—especially principals—in school settings every semester of coursework; (3) observing and evaluating preservice librarians teaching/collaboration/management progress more than just once or twice during a final phase of coursework (i.e., internship or student teaching); (4) employing at least one tenure-track faculty member with a background in school libraries who can teach, conduct research, and mentor preservice school librarians. In fact, ALA accreditation or reaccreditation could depend on these criteria.

Also, graduating school librarian candidates who subscribe to and perpetuate the belief that their professional identities are primarily defined by external forces places a great deal of power in people who have not been trained as librarians, and who may know very little about school librarians' value to student learning and to institutions. To provide K–12 students with the effective school libraries they need and deserve, educators of pre-service school librarians must equip them with a capacity to acknowledge and exercise their internal locus of control. This internal locus of control will help novice school librarians use what they know to be best practices.

To be most effective, pre-service librarians—especially those without teaching experience—should have a grounding in systems thinking. Without this foundation, school librarians will lack the knowledge of the system and how school librarians can strategically enter the system. If school librarians cannot change the system for school libraries, who can and/or will?

Using Narrative Inquiry

The literature reveals that autobiographical narratives help educators understand their professional work, specifically the emotional complexities and the potential CEs have to inform their professional future (Connelly and Clandinin 1990; Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999; Lyons and LaBoskey 2002; Carr 1986; Webster and Mertova 2007). Likewise, this study reveals the importance of writing autobiographical narratives to reflect on one's professional identity as an in-service librarian. Because of the importance of writing autobiographical narratives, librarian preparation and professional development programs should incorporate this writing into their curricula. Not only can reading autobiographies help pre-service librarians learn about the nature

of their future work, but writing narratives can provide librarians of all levels of experience an opportunity to establish healthy, realistic professional identities and pathways for professional development.

Preventing Isolation

The isolation of novice school librarians prevents their professional growth, identity development, and occupational socialization (Hartzell 2002; Carter and Doyle 1996). Present configurations of online communities and professional conferences do not always provide the intimate, reciprocal relationships that school librarians greatly need during their first year as practitioners, the most influential year of their professional careers in school librarianship. Preparation programs could enable future school librarians to select a practitioner sponsor early in the graduate plan of study. The relationship could extend through student-teaching/practicums and into the first few years of practice. This system could use Alcoholics Anonymous's practice of sponsorship as its guide. In short, school librarians would have ready access to a sponsor in times of professional crisis.

In addition, school librarian preparation programs could extend academic coursework (through online, face-to-face, or hybrid programs) into the first year of practice. This approach would keep school librarians connected to university mentors and other school librarians during the most influential year of their professional identity development in school librarianship (Gold 1996). The extension of coursework would also increase the knowledge of professors working in the professional programs. Instead of having a distant and outdated relationship with librarianship as a practice, this extension of coursework for in-service librarians could help professors keep their preparation program's curriculum relevant.

Another concern revealed is the isolation of school librarians during their preparation programs, completely separated from administrators (Hartzell 2002). This isolation may not be detrimental for pre-service school librarians who have formed their professional identities as teachers working alongside administrators. But those librarians who lack this experience must gain confidence as change agents within the authority hierarchy in a school. Likewise, for administrators to foster healthy identity development for in-service school librarians, administrators need to understand the school librarians' formation of professional identity during their preparation programs. More collaboration between school librarian preparation programs and school leader preparation programs should exist to build a better relationship between the two professions.

Recommendations for Altering School Librarians' Agency

With the future of school librarianship considered uncertain as increasing numbers of school librarians' jobs have been eliminated in the United States, school librarians must understand their own agency as well as an understanding of systems thinking, that is, an understanding of how systems work and their components interact. Without this type of training in their library preparation program, many school librarians will not tap into their own agency during critical events. In addition, their lack knowledge of the system of the school or school district, how to enter the system, and, ultimately, how to change the system will also affect their agency and ultimately silence voices of the next generation of school librarians.

For school librarians who are already serving in the field, post-graduate professional development programs through AASL, especially ones that involved 1:1 mentors, could assist librarians in reframing their locus of control and recognizing their agency. Systems thinking could be improved through state and national programming and conferences. Although systems thinking is often presented through weighty theory, school librarians might prefer to explore systems thinking through familiar texts like *Butter Battle Book* or *The Lorax* or active-learning pedagogies.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study analyzes the professional identities related to school librarians' CEs, it joins a miniscule body of literature about novice school librarian professional identities. This study is limited by the small sample size (n=3) and the fact that all participants entered a specialized fast-track librarian preparation program without having earned a teaching credential previously. This circumstance may have magnified their vulnerability in their schools. Future studies could explore the following: Does earning a teaching credential, while also completing a degree in library science, set novice school librarians up for failure? What messages do fast-track certification programs ultimately communicate in relationship to the school library profession? How do these messages influence the identity development of a school librarian?

Extending future research beyond fast-track programs, it is important to understand how seasoned educators, who completed a traditional library degree, experience CEs in the early years of their library career. Would they use different tools and strategies, or would their professional identities about impact, respect, leadership, and confidence be similarly challenged? Related questions remain: Which professional identities and practices reduce occupational vulnerability on a local level? Which professional identities and practices magnify occupational vulnerability? Furthermore, the school librarian profession could benefit from an analysis of the role librarian preparation programs and mentoring programs within K–12 schools have in reducing occupational vulnerability.

Beyond the identity development of school librarians, researchers should explore graduating school librarians' confidence levels and well as school librarian practitioners with success as change makers. To what do they point to as developing their skills and abilities as change makers? Furthermore, what collaborations are school library programs designing with educational leadership programs, and how are these collaborations impacting librarian-principal relationships at the building level? What curricular innovations are school library programs implementing in regards to strategic advocacy in relationship to existing systems? How are these innovations evaluated and measured for programmatic accreditation (or reaccreditation)—if at all?

Appendix A: Summary of Participants' Identity Claims

The participants' identity claims, as revealed throughout their CE narratives, are categorized in the tables below. Next to each claim is a number that indicates the number of times the participant's narrative overtly or covertly claimed it.

Table A-1. Ginger's Identity Claims in Critical Events Narrative

Identity Claims about Herself	Identity Claims Related to Her Needs from Others	Identity Claims Related to Work Environments
<p><i>I am deserving of professional respect. (10)</i></p> <p><i>Others take advantage of me. (6)</i></p> <p><i>I privately question authority. (5)</i></p> <p><i>I believe I can make a difference. (4)</i></p> <p><i>I am solitary. (2)</i></p> <p><i>I am professionally ambitious. (2)</i></p> <p><i>I am honest. (1)</i></p> <p><i>I don't know how to set professional boundaries. (1)</i></p> <p><i>I want to do everything, but I get burned out. (1)</i></p> <p><i>I do not always communicate my needs clearly. (1)</i></p>	<p><i>I want to be supported. (5)</i></p> <p><i>I want to be accepted. (2)</i></p> <p><i>I want to be informed. (1)</i></p>	<p><i>I want professional stability. (1)</i></p>

Table A-2. Lucy’s Identity Claims in Critical Events Narrative

Identity Claims about Herself	Identity Claims Related to Her Needs from Others
<p><i>I privately question authority. (12)</i></p> <p><i>I am not confident. (6)</i></p> <p><i>I am compliant. (6)</i></p> <p><i>I am embarrassed by my emotions. (6)</i></p> <p><i>I fear conflict. (6)</i></p> <p><i>I don’t avoid things. (5)</i></p> <p><i>I care about the opinions of others. (5)</i></p> <p><i>I am physically affected by my emotions. (4)</i></p> <p><i>I fear authority. (3)</i></p> <p><i>I care about appearances. (3)</i></p> <p><i>I am naive. (2)</i></p>	<p><i>My work isn’t valued. (16)</i></p> <p><i>I am not respected. (5)</i></p> <p><i>My superiors don’t trust me as a professional. (3)</i></p>

Table A-3. Izzie’s Identity Claims before Her Critical Event (in Critical Event Narrative)

Identity Claims about Herself	Identity Claims Related to Her Needs from Others	Identity Claims Related to What She Needed in a Work Environment
<p><i>I am hopeful. (11)</i></p> <p><i>I am confident. (14)</i></p> <p><i>I believe I can make a difference. (1)</i></p>	<p><i>I am not professionally respected. (12)</i></p>	<p><i>I need autonomy. (8)</i></p>

<p><i>I trust people in leadership. (5)</i></p> <p><i>I like a challenge. (6)</i></p> <p><i>I let my fears hold me back. (5)</i></p> <p><i>I am a visionary. (12)</i></p> <p><i>I am assertive. (12)</i></p> <p><i>I am critical of others. (19)</i></p>		
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Table B-4. Izzie’s Identity Claims after Critical Event (in Critical Event Narrative)

<p><i>Altered from I am hopeful to I am regretful. (10)</i></p> <p><i>Altered from I am confident to I am not confident. (7)</i></p> <p><i>Altered from I believe I can make a difference to I don’t believe I can make a difference. (7)</i></p> <p><i>Altered from I trust people in leadership to I can’t trust people in leadership. (13)</i></p>

Appendix B: Summary of Participants’ Post-Performance Identity Claims

During post-performance interviews, all participants explained the changes and/or transformation in their professional identities and what or whom they believed caused the changes. In the tables below these shifts are labeled for each participant

Table B-1. Ginger’s Post-Performance Identity Claims

I No Longer Identify with This Claim Because I Made a Change.	I No Longer Identify with This Claim Because a New School Culture Changed This for Me.	I No Longer Identify with This Claim Because a New Administrator Changed This for Me.
<p><i>Others take advantage of me.</i></p> <p><i>I don’t know how to set professional boundaries.</i></p>	<p><i>Others take advantage of me.</i></p> <p><i>I don’t know how to set professional boundaries.</i></p> <p><i>I am solitary.</i></p> <p><i>I want to do everything, but I get burned out.</i></p> <p><i>I do not always communicate my needs clearly.</i></p>	<p><i>I privately question authority.</i></p> <p><i>I don’t know how to set professional boundaries.</i></p>

Table B-2. Lucy’s Post-Performance Identity Claims

I No Longer Identify with This Claim Because I Made a Change.	I No Longer Identify with This Claim Because a New School Culture Changed This for Me.	I No Longer Identify with This Claim Because a New Administrator Changed This for Me.
<p>N/A</p>	<p><i>My work isn’t valued.</i></p>	<p><i>I am not respected.</i></p> <p><i>My superiors don’t trust me as a professional.</i></p> <p><i>I fear authority.</i></p>

Table B-3. Izzie’s Post-Performance Identity Claims

I No Longer Identify with This Claim Because I Made a Change	I No Longer Identify with This Claim, Because Others Influenced Me to Make a Change.
<p><i>I am regretful.</i></p> <p><i>I am assertive.</i></p> <p><i>I don’t believe I can make a difference.</i></p>	<p><i>I am not confident.</i></p>

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