Leading from the Middle: A Narrative Analysis of Award-Winning School Library Media Specialists in Georgia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze and share the leadership stories of successful library media specialists, uncovering how they perceive themselves as leaders, how they enact leadership in their role, and bridge the gap between leadership standards and the lived professional experiences of library media specialists as school leaders. The six participants in this study were school library media specialists in Georgia that won Library Media Specialist of the Year and/or Exemplary Library Media Program during the years 2017-2021.

Research data was collected through three interviews with each participant using a narrative inquiry approach. Descriptive coding, focused coding, and connection strategies were used to analyze the data. Five themes emerged from the data, including relationships, communication, dispositions, leadership, and continued learning. Implications for practice include leadership study as a focus for graduate degree programs in library media education, as well as in professional learning and library media advocacy work. Future research suggestions include gaining the perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators on library media specialist leadership, as well as a broader geographic study of library media specialists.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Lynne Scott, who chose to love me as one of her own. Thank you for your generosity, your kindness, your humor, your love, and for always believing in me. I know you will be smiling down on me on graduation day.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Growing up in the 1980s, my local public library and my school library were both revered places of escape, wonder, and possibility. There were so many lovely books, and all for the taking. I made weekly trips to the public library, and, if I could convince my teachers, daily trips to the school library. I was *that* kid.

As a high school student in the early 1990s, libraries began to change. I was a part of the first news broadcast team at my school, which met in a library storage closet converted into a news studio. Right outside our closet studio was the card catalog, a soon-to-be relic in the upcoming digital age. Technology was beginning to take up permanent residence in the library, and it piqued my interest in the possibilities of communication using technology. I graduated high school and entered college as a journalism major. Many years and degrees later, I became a library media specialist myself, and I now serve as a district leader for school library media programs. The school library has become my profession and my passion.

As technology evolved throughout the 2000s, library spaces and programs changed significantly, and the focus for school libraries broadened from managing resources to equipping students as lifelong learners (Wine, 2016). The roles and responsibilities of librarians changed with the addition of new technologies and internet access (American Association of School Librarians [AASL] & Association for

1

Educational Communication and Technology [AECT], 1998). When the participatory web, often referred to as Web 2.0, became mainstream in the early 2000s, the role of the library media specialist expanded once again to include expertise in digital content creation and collaboration (AASL, 2009a; Lankes et al., 2007). The library was no longer a quiet place full of reverence, but developing into a hub of creativity, print and digital materials, and collaboration (Koechlin et al., 2008).

The national call for school library media specialists to lead has also evolved over many years; AASL first mentioned leadership one time in their *Standards for School Libraries* in 1969. By 2018, AASL stated that the role of the school library media specialist "has evolved from responding to the needs of a single building to providing high-impact leadership for the success of the entire school community" (AASL, 2018b, p. 1). The leadership call has been heeded by some library media specialists and ignored or viewed as unattainable by many (AASL, 2016). This reluctance to lead, or lack of knowledge on how to lead, can be detrimental to school library media programs, especially in lean budget years and in times of local school flexibility (Weisburg, 2017). Since several studies have shown that strong library media programs lead to increased student achievement (Lance & Kachel, 2018), it is in students' best interest to have access to a dynamic and well-funded school library media program.

I was motivated to study how award-winning library media specialists define leadership, show leadership skills, and build their capacity as leaders. My research with award-winning Georgia school library media specialists has increased my understanding of their leadership practices, including how they build relationships, collaborate, communicate, learn as leaders, and navigate challenges. With this increased

2

understanding, I can provide better support and further develop the leadership capacities of library media specialists in Georgia, advocate for appropriate funding for library media programs and positions, as well as fill the gap in the existing literature so that this research may benefit additional educational stakeholders.

Statement of the Problem

Federal funding became available to school libraries for the first time in 1958 through the National Defense Education Act (Michie & Holton, 2005). In 1965, school libraries became a larger literacy focal point, and federal funding increased to $100 million with the passing of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (Michie & Holton, 2005). Over the next few decades, school library funding remained steady, but slowly became a part of block grants to states or were used to fund instructional reading programs (Michie & Holton, 2005). In 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was signed into law, bringing about an increase in accountability measures for states and local educational agencies (Doan, 2008). Many of the NCLB requirements were criticized and led to states and local educational agencies to look for ways to manage the stipulations quickly and successfully while maintaining federal funding (Doan, 2008). States and local educational agencies were able to opt out of NCLB provisions by applying to the United States Department of Education for waivers (Doan, 2008; Posey, 2014). Waivers increasingly became a viable and popular option since they allowed states and local educational agencies to opt out of NCLB requirements but did not endanger federal funding (Doan, 2008; Posey, 2014). By 2014, flexibility in how states complied with NCLB requirements was the new normal, as NCLB waivers had been granted in 43 states

(Posey, 2014). NCLB waivers allowed states to create their own goals for accountability, educational processes, and assessments (House, 2013).

In 2008, in response to the NCLB waiver movement and during tough economic times, Georgia House Bill 1209 was passed, allowing for increased flexibility in staffing and spending in Georgia public schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2020b; Georgia General Assembly, 2008). In return for increased flexibility, school districts committed to increased student achievement as measured by standardized test scores (Georgia Department of Education, 2020b; Georgia General Assembly, 2008). With this focus on meeting student achievement goals, combined with the data focus of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(2002) and a newfound softening of funding mandates, educational leaders in many states began to move staffing allocations away from library media specialists to positions like literacy coaches or academic coaches (Bromley, 2011; Lance, 2018; Peterson, 2014). The school librarian, long protected as a required position for federal funding, became a role school administrators viewed as an optional (Everhart, 2016; Peterson, 2014; Weisburg 2017).

At the same time in the early 2000s, the role of the school library media specialist was undergoing a significant shift from resource provider and technology specialist to also include instructional collaborator and leader (AASL, 2009a; Hand, 2011). This shift was partially rooted in advances in technology, and library media specialists developed expertise in the expanding, participatory internet and the educational purposes of technology (Hand, 2011; Lankes et al., 2007). The practice of teaching research skills to students once or twice a year evolved into frequent collaboration with teachers to engage students' critical thinking skills, help them learn how to evaluate sources for credibility,

4

develop print as well as digital literacy skills, and create their own digital content (Bromley, 2011; Hand, 2011). In 2012, AASL encouraged library media specialists to empower learners through leadership by being early adopters of educational technology trends and by serving on school building leadership teams. These major shifts in the practice of a school library media specialist coincided with an economic downturn, flexible staffing regulations, and a focus on academic standardized testing and data. As an additional complication, library media specialists had been protected for many years as a mandated position since the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); library media specialists had not educated stakeholders about their complex work (Weisburg, 2017). Confusion around the expanding roles of the library media specialist increased the likelihood of their positions being cut by administrators (Weisburg, 2017). Many library media specialists were scrambling to hold their programs together and lacked the capacity, time, or school culture to grow as instructional leaders (Bromley, 2011). Furthermore, many library media specialists viewed leadership as unimportant when weighed against other job responsibilities (AASL, 2016). Locally, the Georgia Department of Education was using the Georgia Media Specialist Evaluation Program, an evaluation tool developed in the late 1980s and reflective of the job description of the library media specialist at that time (Callahan & Reeves, 1990, Snipes & Frilot, 2019). National standards were moving forward, but Georgia library media specialists were being evaluated using a dated instrument that did not address the role of library media specialists as leaders.

Multiple organizations have now called upon school library media specialists to act as leaders, including the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2012),

the International Society for Technology in Education (Perez, 2010), and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 1969; AASL & AECT, 1988; AASL & AECT, 1998; AASL, 2009a; AASL, 2012). While several resources exist for library media standards about leadership, there is a gap in understanding what library media leadership looks like in practice (Smith, 2013). There is a need to explore the backgrounds, learning pathways, and the lived experiences of library media specialists that have created successful library media programs and operate as leaders in their school (Harland, 2020; Smith, 2013). Using a narrative approach, the information and experiences explored in this proposed study will provide valuable insight and clarity for library media specialists and educational stakeholders as they work to develop strong library media programs that positively impact student engagement and achievement.

Purpose

Leadership standards for library media specialists now exist from several national organizations (AASL, 2009a; AASL, 2012; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2012; Perez, 2010). Recommendations on how school library media specialist leadership is carried out has varied over the years, and navigating national calls for leadership and local school administrator expectations can be challenging for some library media specialists. My main goal in conducting this study was to analyze and share the leadership stories of successful library media specialists, uncovering how they perceive themselves as leaders, how they enact leadership in their role, and bridging the gap between leadership standards and the lived professional experiences of library media specialists as school leaders.

This study attempts to fill the gap between organizational calls for library media leadership and library media specialists who view leadership as unattainable by collecting leadership stories through narrative inquiry and analysis and grounded in a conceptual framework of school library media specialist leadership. By conducting this qualitative study of library media specialists as leaders, current and future library media specialists can read the findings from this research and will be able to better understand how they can grow as leaders and become more visible in their schools. Educational stakeholders may read the experiences of library media specialists as leaders and better understand the role and impact of library media specialists, helping ensure the stability of their position and funding for library media programs in schools. Library media specialists may also read the results of this study and feel empowered to help school administrators and school board members better understand the role of the library media specialist, an important component of the local advocacy necessary for school library media programs during times of flexible staffing requirements. Strong library media programs, led by certified library media specialists, lead to increases in standardized reading and writing scores, as well as graduation rates (Lance & Kachel, 2018). Library media specialists growing as leaders, as well as advocating locally for their programs, helps ensure that students have access to thriving school library media programs (Lance & Kachel, 2018; Weisburg, 2017).

Research Questions

To fill the defined gap in the existing literature and provide insight regarding the leadership practices of award-winning library media specialists, I conducted a qualitative study that addresses the following initial questions. The questions were the focus of this

7

narrative study and were crafted to increase understanding about the role of leadership in library media specialists.

1) How do award-winning school library media specialists define their leadership role?

2) How do award-winning school library media specialists perceive they demonstrate leadership?

3) How do award-winning school library media specialists build their capacity as leaders?

Significance of the Study

Information gathered from this study has added an original contribution to the body of literature about the leadership practices of school library media specialists. Through the stories that library media specialists narrate about their experiences, new information is shared regarding the leadership strategies that award-winning library media specialists employ in their own context. My goal was to capture the nuanced, yet significant ways that library media specialists operate as leaders within their school environments. As library media programs vary in responsibilities, size, and expectations throughout the state of Georgia, I chose to illuminate the success of library media specialists within different environments. The narratives of strong library media specialists have filled a gap in the existing literature and have provided compelling evidence to school administrators why a library media program, led by a certified library media specialist, should be prioritized for their students and teachers. The information produced in this study can also work alongside existing school library media standards

and leadership strategies by creating a picture of what school library media specialist leadership looks like in practice, over time, and in different contexts.

This qualitative study provided participants with the opportunity to share their experiences of successful library media practice and encouraged deep reflection about their own development and growth as a library media specialist, award-winner, and leader. This reflective process provided participants with additional insight into their leadership skills as a library media specialist and illuminated areas of strength they may develop further. Participants, along with their administrators, can read the results of this study, gaining an increased awareness about the positive impact and leadership practices of a library media specialist. The results of this study may be published as a series of leadership vignettes in professional journals, enabling a large number of library media specialists to read about leadership in action. The results of this study can also serve as a focal point for professional learning about leadership in practice for library media specialists.

Through national and state school library organizations, such as the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Georgia Library Media Association (GLMA), these findings could be widely available to library media specialists nationally, allowing the library media community to review the results of this study to better understand the position of library media specialist in practice and how library media specialists engage in a nuanced form of leadership. As library media specialists are largely singletons in their school buildings, reading the detailed experiences and leadership practices of other library media specialists may be enlightening and beneficial in their own work. Additionally, library media specialists may uncover a newfound

9

perspective that helps them describe their own impact with their school administrators and educational stakeholders.

As staffing flexibility continues in public education, the research generated from this study shows educational stakeholders how library media specialists serve as instructional leaders in their schools. By creating an opportunity for greater understanding of the leadership capacities and instructional impact of library media specialists, there is the chance for increased stability of the position of library media specialist and the development of library media programs. School library advocates may use this research to strengthen arguments for policies that emphasize the need for fully funded library media programs led by certified school library media specialists. Strong library media programs improve school-wide instructional practices, develop students' print and digital literacy skills, and increase academic achievement (Lance & Kachel, 2018). By providing students with access to a high-quality library media program that integrates all curriculum areas, students have the opportunity to develop deep, life-long information literacy skills, such as digital citizenship, the effective use of technology, critical reading abilities, and evaluating the credibility of resources (Lance & Maniotes, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

Maxwell (2013) explained that a conceptual model is "primarily a conception or model of what is out there that you plan to study, and of what is going on with these things and why - a tentative *theory* of the phenomena that you are investigating" (p. 39). The conceptual framework for this proposed study provides contextual foundations for the main concepts associated with the leadership experiences of library media specialists,

as well as a framework for understanding and analyzing the narratives. The previous discussion of existing theory is a major component of this conceptual framework, anchored in the meta-ethnographic work of Everhart and Johnston (2016) of creating a proposed theory of school librarian leadership. Transformational leadership theory provides additional clarity in considering how library media specialists engage in leadership work. After extensive analysis to better understand concepts and relationships, Everhart and Johnston (2016) synthesized the studies and proposed the conceptual model in Figure 1 as a foundation for a theoretical framework.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of School Librarian Leadership
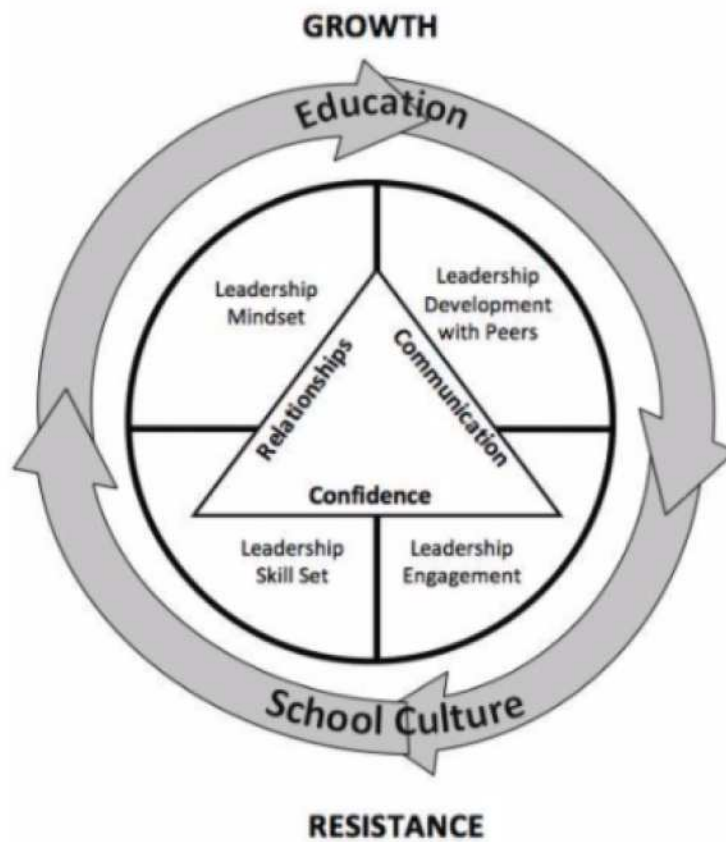
Everhart and Johnston (2016) identified five main concepts in the research: resistance, growth, relationships, communication, and confidence. These concepts represent a framework for narrative inquiry into the leadership of library media specialists. Resistance, characterized by a lack of risk-taking, an unwillingness to acknowledge needed change, and a lack of involvement in technology, was a commonality among library media specialists in the studies analyzed by Everhart and Johnston (2016). In opposition to resistance, growth also emerged as a concept, representing the development of the library media specialist as a leader, as well as positive change.

The three most important concepts of school library media specialist leadership are relationships, communication, and confidence (Everhart & Johnston, 2016). These interrelated and overlapping concepts were defined by Everhart and Johnston (2016) as the "core of school librarian leadership" (p. 21). Relationships were defined by Everhart and Johnston (2016) as a key concept of school library media specialist leadership due to the significance of positive relationships with other library media specialists and mentors, as well as collaborative relationships with teachers, administrators, technology specialists, and district coordinators. In conjunction with relationships, communication also emerged as a concept and a pathway to effective leadership. Lastly, Everhart and Johnston (2016) identified confidence as a critical concept for school library media

specialists as leaders, including "confidence in teaching abilities, leadership abilities, and technology abilities" (p. 21).

The conceptual model of school library media specialist leadership that Everhart and Johnston (2016) created was grounded in six studies and was designed to be flexible enough to be updated as research evolves. Additionally, Everhart and Johnston (2016) stated that the related concepts and propositions need to be explored in real-world environments to continue theory development. In this proposed study, I aim to use this conceptual model of school library media specialist leadership as a framework for exploring and understanding the lived experiences of library media specialists as leaders. The narrative analysis derived from this proposed study may inform the development of theory based on this conceptual model and fill a gap in the existing literature.

Definitions

The following terms are used in this study and are defined here to aid in understanding and clarity.

21st-century skills. A set of competencies students need to master to be successful in the 21st century, such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication (AASL, 2009b).

AASL. The American Association of School Librarians; the national group for school librarians and a division of the American Libraries Association (AASL, 2021).

AECT. The Association for Educational Communications and Technology; an international organization (AECT, 2021).

Award-winning: This term refers to a library media specialist earning Georgia regional or state honors as Library Media Specialist of the Year, or Georgia Exemplary Library Media Program of the Year, or Georgia Exceptional Library Media Program of the Year.

Flexibility models. This term refers to school systems having the flexibility to opt out of educational requirements, such as having a full-time library media specialist, and still receive federal funds (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020).

GLMA. The Georgia Library Media Association; the state organization for school library media specialists in Georgia and an affiliate of AASL (GLMA, 2021a).

GLA. The Georgia Library Association. A broader organization for all librarians in Georgia and an affiliate of ALA (GLA, 2021).

GMSEP. The Georgia Media Specialist Evaluation Program. Developed in the late 1980s and is still being used by many districts in Georgia to evaluate library media specialists (Callahan & Reeves, 1990).

Learning Commons. A collaborative physical and virtual environment that is designed to invite patrons, sparks participatory learning, and is led by a certified and visionary library media specialist (Loertscher & Koechlin, 2014).

Library media paraprofessional. This term refers to the support role in a school library media program. Other terms include library media clerk and the shortened term library media para.

Library media program. This refers to the scope of work led by the school library media specialist and encompasses teaching, curating, budgeting, collaborating, planning, etc.

Library media specialist. This is the term used to describe the certified leader of the library media program. Other terms include school library media specialist, librarian, and teacher-librarian.

Makerspace. This term is used to describe a type of library programming, and often refers to a physical area in school libraries. Makerspaces are designated for student exploration and creative thinking, and typically includes hands-on technology, such as programmable robots.

Patron. This term refers to those that visit and use the school library media center and its resources.

SLEI. The School Librarian Evaluation Instrument. An updated evaluation instrument for school library media specialists that aligns with current evaluation systems for teachers and leaders. Created by a Georgia state-wide consortium of school library media leaders in 2014 (GLMA, 2021c).

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

From 1999-2016, more than 10,000 school library media specialist positions were cut, representing almost 20% of the profession; during this same time period, positions such as instructional coordinators and technology specialists saw significant increases (Lance, 2018). The long-standing tenure for school library media specialists provided by educational accreditation rules was gone, due to an economic downturn and increased flexibility in local schools (Weisburg, 2017). Concurrently, technology was developing rapidly, creating the need for 21st century skills and large-scale changes in K-12 education, an institution that remained relatively unchanged for decades (Sacconaghi, 2006). School library media specialists needed to not only embrace technology, but also guide the work of educational change through instructional collaboration and leadership. As Weisburg (2017) stated, "Librarians must learn how to lead in order for their programs to succeed and thrive" (p. xv).

In this literature review I will provide context for this proposed research into the leadership lives of school library media specialists, highlighting the positive impact of a library media specialist, as well as the urgent need for the role of the library media specialist to evolve into a position that focuses on instructional leadership. There is a lack, however, of school library leadership narratives in the current literature. Further inquiry into the experiences and behaviors of library media specialist leaders is needed.

The review begins with a discussion of the impact of the school library program to provide context regarding the influence the library media specialist has on academic achievement. Next, an exploration of the changing and expanding role of the library media specialist sheds light into the myriad responsibilities of the position, including the call to leadership. The review of the literature continues with an examination of leadership theory, including a proposed theory of school library media leadership, as well as leadership dispositions. Additionally, the topics of leadership education, school culture, and the shift from management to leadership are explored to provide needed context to leadership growth in library media specialists.

The Impact of the School Library Program

In this section, the history and impact of the school library program is presented to provide context for the role of the library media specialist as a leader. School library programs had humble beginnings and have evolved and expanded over time (ALA, 2011; Woolls, 2003). Wiegand (2007) noted that "in recent years, students annually averaged 1.5 billion visits to school libraries, about one and a half times the number of visits to state and national parks (p. 57). Additionally, the role of the school library media specialist has transformed from a support role to one where leadership and vision are needed (AASL, 2017; Coatney & Harada, 2017; Loertscher, 2017; Weisburg, 2017). A collective review of school library impact studies is included in this section as a backdrop for leadership behaviors in school library media specialists.

The first official U.S. recommendation for school libraries likely came from Benjamin Franklin in 1740, when he considered them a key component of an ideal academy (ALA, 2011). According to Woolls (2003), school libraries grew throughout the

19th century in conjunction with the growth of American public libraries; however, school libraries developed more slowly than their public counterparts until schools began being accredited in the latter part of the 19th century. By 1900, the first professionally trained school librarian, Mary Kingsbury, was hired to manage the school library at Erasmus High School in Brooklyn (Woolls, 2003). Though school libraries continued to be heavily influenced by public libraries throughout the early 20th century, Woolls (2003) goes on to note that school libraries were taking their own shape through organizational standards and legislative efforts. In the 1950s and 1960s, school libraries experienced significant growth, as the space race led to increased federal funding for education, including library materials (United States Senate, n.d.; Woolls, 2003). By the 1980s, microcomputer technology took up residence in schools, beginning its lasting influence on the school library media program (Woolls, 2003).

In the 1990s, a body of literature known as school library impact studies began to gain momentum in library research; these studies ushered in a focus on connecting school libraries to student achievement (Gretes, 2013; Woolls, 2003). The school library, long an established area of the school building and an unquestioned academic tradition, was being analyzed through a new lens that aligned with the educational emphasis on standardized testing (Gretes, 2013; Woolls, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) intensified the notion that the effectiveness of educators should be evaluated through the standardized test scores of students. As a result, the body of school library impact studies expanded as school library researchers, such as Dr. Keith Curry Lance, endeavored to link school library media specialists, in addition to their programs, to standardized test scores (Lance & Kachel, 2013; Lance et al., 2010). Studies also

examined a wide range of library elements, including student access to books and technology, as well as the significance of full-time certified school library media specialists who teach critical thinking skills, develop students' literacy skills, focus on increasing content mastery, and provide equitable access to resources (Gretes, 2013; Lance et al., 2010).

In 2013, Francis Gretes published a review of the current research on the impact of school library programs. Her review showed that findings in over 60 studies in more than 20 states showed significant student learning gains in schools with a well-funded library and a full-time, certified school library media specialist and support staff. Furthermore, studies that included over 8,700 schools and over 2.6 million students showed that students with access to a strong library media program scored 10-20% higher on state and national standardized tests that measure reading and achievement. Studies also showed that this positive effect remains steady even with varying student-teacher ratio, demographics, or socio-economic conditions (Gretes, 2013). In their increasingly instructional role, school library media specialists collaborate with administrators in working toward school instructional goals and with teachers to develop students' critical thinking skills and content mastery (Gretes, 2013; Hand, 2011). In addition to providing students with access to a curated collection of print and digital materials, library media specialists also act as "leader, instructional partner, information specialist, teacher, and program manager," (Gretes, 2013, p. 5).

The positive correlation between fully staffed school library programs and student achievement established in earlier years has been confirmed in additional recent studies (Coker, 2015; Lance et al., 2010; Scholastic, 2016). These studies also expanded to

include broader definitions of student success by articulating an increased emphasis on digital literacy skills and writing skills, in addition to reading skills. In 2016, Scholastic published *School Libraries Work! A Compendium of Research Supporting the Effectiveness of School Libraries*. A key trend identified in the analysis of school library impact studies and reports from 25 states is that library media specialists play an integral role in teaching and supporting 21st-century skills. The term 21st-century skills encompass a varied set of competencies that include critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication (AASL, 2009b). Student skills that fall into these categories are not often measured by standardized tests, though parents, educators, and employers often cite these skills as necessary for success in college and career (Sacconaghi, 2006). Additional positive correlations have been made between strong library programs and graduation rates, as well as mastery of academic standards (Lance & Kachel, 2018).

While most studies cite the positive relationship between school libraries and student achievement, Scholastic (2016) identified a second key trend through a negative lens: reductions in school library staffing were linked to lower student achievement. Despite many studies over several decades that underscore the correlation between well-funded, properly staffed school libraries and higher student achievement, funding for school libraries has deteriorated in many areas across the United States. Over 10,000 library media specialist positions were cut from 1999-2016, representing almost 20% of the profession (Lance, 2018). During the same time period, other educational positions, such as instructional coordinators and technology specialists, saw significant increases (Lance, 2018). The role of the school library media specialist had long been viewed as a

support position by school leaders, and, as a result, was subject to cuts once staffing flexibility was granted (Bromley, 2011; Hardy, 2010).

The exploration of the impact of school libraries in this section provides context for the nuanced position of the school library media specialist as leader. Additionally, it is important to understand that while multiple studies point to the positive connection between strong library media programs and student achievement, school library media specialist positions have been cut significantly in the past few decades (Lance, 2018; Scholastic, 2016). This complicated context serves as the backdrop of leadership behaviors in school library media specialists.

The Expanding Role of the Library Media Specialist

The role of the library media specialist began as the school librarian who curated a collection of books (Woolls, 2003). Over time, this role has broadened significantly to include technology, instructional collaboration, digital literacy skills, and leadership (Loertscher, 2017; Weisburg, 2017). Recent budget cuts and flexibility models have also had a marked impact on the changing nature of the library media specialist position (Weisburg, 2017). The expanding role of the library media specialist has implications for leadership, and this section provides context for how and why leadership behaviors exist within the role.

After Mary Kingsbury was hired as the first professionally trained school librarian in the United States in 1900, the National Education Agency created the first set of school library standards in 1919 (Woolls, 2003). These standards aided in distinguishing the different purposes and practices of school librarians from public librarians (Woolls, 2003). The role of the school librarian was solidified when K-12 accreditation began to

take shape in the early to mid-20th century (Woolls, 1999). At this time, Woolls (1999) noted, accreditation standards focused on items such as a school having a dedicated school librarian, the number of library books in the collection, and the level of professional training and education of the school librarian.

Funding further boosted the role of the school library media specialist in 1958 when the National Defense Education Act passed; this legislation was created in response to the Soviet Union's success with Sputnik (United States Senate, n.d.; Woolls, 2003). The federal funds provided to schools were used to build school library collections, as well as explore emerging audiovisual technologies (United States Senate, n.d.; Woolls, 2003). In 1960, the American Association of School Librarians, then a relatively new division of the American Libraries Association, released *Standards for School Media Programs,* stating that schools should hire one professionally trained library media specialist for every 600 students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), introduced in 1965, provided over $100,000,000 for the purchase of library materials, textbooks, and instructional resources for teachers and students (United States Office of Education, 1966). ESEA funding played a large part in increasing the percentage of schools with libraries from 50% in 1953 to 93% by 1985 (Wiegand, 2007). School leaders had funding, as well as guidelines for school library staffing, and the school library media specialist became an integral support role for the academic program (Wiegand, 2007).

By the 1970s and 1980s, school library media specialists were developing expertise in the new field of information literacy, as audiovisual technology advanced and computers became a part of the school library landscape (Wine, 2016; Woolls, 2003).

In 1988, AASL joined with the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) to write the seminal text *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs,* highlighting the complex and expanding nature of the role of the school library media specialist:

> To carry out the mission of the program, the library media specialist performs the following separate but overlapping roles to link the information resources and services of the library media program to the information needs and interests of the school's students and staff: information specialist, teacher, instructional consultant. (p. 26)

While school library media specialists had long been responsible for providing access to information and resources, this time period marked significant change for library media specialists: "the importance and complexity of this function have increased dramatically in recent years, in part, due to the revolution in information and instructional technologies" (AASL & AECT, 1988, p. 27).

And yet, in 1988, the technology revolution was just getting started. Over the next several decades, the field of instructional technology grew exponentially, resulting in new positions in schools, such as the technology specialist (Johnston, 2015; Wine, 2016). Library media specialists, once viewed as the school leader in educational technology, now shared responsibilities with new support personnel; the overlapping nature of the roles caused confusion for administrators and teachers (Johnston, 2015).

Most recently, two events have had significant impact on the role of the library media specialist: the economic downturn in the late 2000s, and the flexibility initiatives allowing for greater versatility in how funds and personnel allocations are used (Office of

Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020). Long a mandated position since the 1965

Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the library media specialist was now subject to

cuts due to flexibility models (Weisburg, 2017). Confusion around the expanded and

multilayered roles of the library media specialist increased the likelihood of being

eliminated in favor of new, more easily defined positions, such as the technology

specialist (Weisburg, 2017). Further complicating matters, library media specialists, who

had been protected as a mandated position, had not educated others about their

complicated work (Weisburg, 2017). As Weisburg (2017) stated, when educational

leaders were faced with tough budget cuts and difficult staffing choices, they likely

thought:

> Librarians do nothing more than check out books. Volunteers could do the same
>
> job, if necessary. Besides, many teachers now had classroom collections, and
>
> there was the internet. Anyone could use Google and Wikipedia to get all the
>
> answers at the click of a mouse. Who needed a librarian? (p. 4)

Additionally, even when the library media specialist position remained, support staff

were cut, and library budgets dried up in many cases (Weisburg, 2017). In these uncertain

and lean times, library media specialists found themselves taking on additional

responsibilities in order to fill gaps and make themselves indispensable (Allen & Bradley,

2009).

Current Roles and Responsibilities

In 2017, AASL revamped their approach to school library guidance by merging

three audiences — the learner, the school librarian, and the school library program —

into one framework, the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School*

Librarians, and School Libraries. Rather than separate standards for each type of audience, a new system of six shared foundations and four domains guided all three audiences in one comprehensive document (AASL, 2017). The six shared foundations are defined as inquiry, include, collaborate, curate, explore, and engage. The four domains include think, create, share, and grow. A graphic representation of the AASL framework is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

AASL Standards Framework
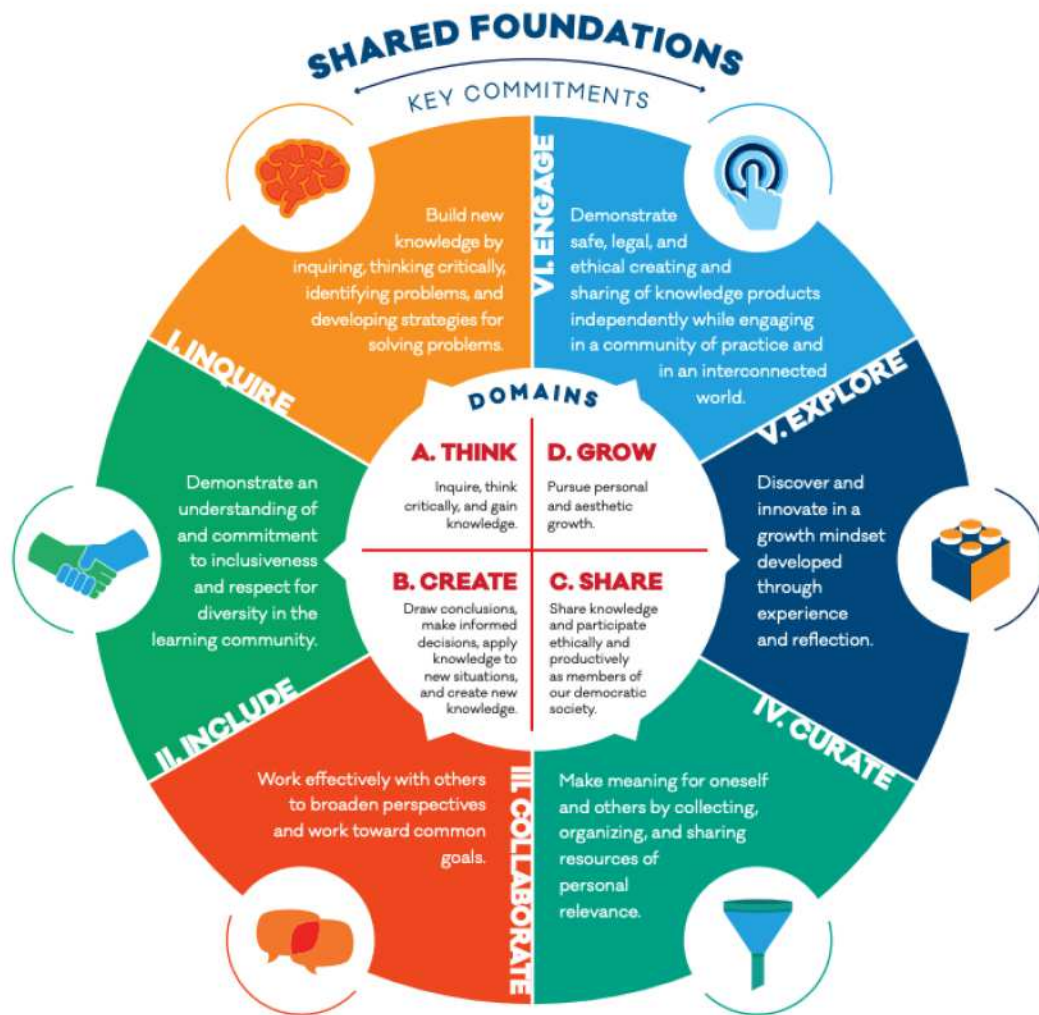
Due to the rapid growth of technology and the need for clarity about the role of the school library media specialist, there was hope that the new set of AASL standards would "be a flagship that may recognize the present but propel us into the future" (Loertscher, 2018, p. 37). David Loertscher, a professor in the School of Information at San Jose State University with six decades of experience in the field of school library media, reviewed the AASL standards and noted 15 major concerns, including a lack of clear vision, a lack of discussion about the role of technology, and the creation of an overly complex set of standards that are difficult to understand (2018). One of Loertscher's (2018) recommendations was to write a new set of standards that could be understood by "parents, teachers, administrators, and librarians who have their own world of regulations and standards to deal with," (pp. 39-40).

School library media specialist roles in Georgia. In school districts across the United States, "early conceptions of the school librarian's job have not evolved over the years even as the duties have expanded exponentially," (Snipes & Frilot, 2019, p. 63). In many school districts, outdated evaluation systems were used for school library media specialists, or evaluation systems designed for support personnel or classroom teachers were used, which meant that evaluation systems were inconsistent with job performance (Snipes & Frilot, 2019). The lack of understanding about the role of the school library media specialist and the lack of a tailored evaluation system for school library media

specialists led to the creation of the School Librarian Evaluation Instrument in Georgia (Snipes & Frilot, 2019).

The School Librarian Evaluation Instrument (SLEI) was created by a state-wide consortium of Georgia school library media leaders and university professors (Georgia Library Media Association, 2020c). The SLEI was released in 2016 and aligned with current evaluation systems for teachers and leaders (Georgia Library Media Association, 2020c). The SLEI is comprised of 10 standards that provide needed clarity about the contemporary role of the school library media specialist and explicitly includes leadership as a major component of the work of school library media specialists (Snipes & Frilot, 2019). Table 1 provides a synopsis of the 10 SLEI standards.

Table 1

The 10 Standards of the School Librarian Evaluation Instrument

1	**Instructional Partnership**	The school library media specialist collaboratively plans instruction and develops the library media program using state and district curricula and standards, instructional calendars, effective strategies, resources, and data to support teachers and address the differentiated needs of all students.
2	**Role of Reading**	The school library media specialist develops a culture of reading and promotes reading as a foundational skill for learning, personal growth, and enjoyment.
3	**Information and Technology Literacy**	The school library media specialist plans and provides instruction that addresses multiple literacies, including information literacy, media literacy, and technology literacy.
4	**Instructional Leadership**	The school library media specialist fosters the success of all students by serving on decision-making teams in the school, designing and delivering professional learning, and contributing to a shared vision of teaching and learning that leads to school improvement.

5	**Effective Practices for Research**	The school library media specialist teaches and models developmentally appropriate best practices for learning and research.
6	**Program Planning and Administration**	The school library media specialist develops and implements a strategic plan and vision for continuous improvement of the library media program and to support the learning goals of the school community.
7	**Positive Learning Environment**	The school library media specialist provides a well-managed, safe, and welcoming environment that supports personalized learning, includes flexible and equitable access to physical and digital resources, ensures a well-rounded education, and encourages respect for all.
8	**Collection Development**	The school library media specialist supports the curriculum through selection and management of resources that meet the needs and interests of patrons.
9	**Professionalism**	The school library media specialist fosters the success of students by demonstrating professional standards and ethics, engaging in continuous professional learning, and contributing to the profession.
10	**Communication**	The school library media specialist fosters the success of all students by communicating and collaborating effectively with stakeholders in ways that enhance student learning and engagement.

Note: Reprinted from *"School Librarian Evaluation Instrument"* by Georgia Library Media Association, 2019. (https://b412e5f7-215d-433b-803e-b136a68190d3.filesusr. com/ugd/9be0f3_693b09388fec45deabc1a37eb2c48007.pdf). Copyright 2019 by Georgia Library Media Association.

To summarize this section about the role of the school library media specialist, the core duties of curating a collection of books and helping patrons find the information they need has always been a part of the role (Woolls, 2003). The role has expanded over time to include a broad scope of information literacy, including the increasingly expansive and critical area of digital literacy (Loertscher, 2017). These expanded responsibilities shifted

the library media specialist position into a more nebulous role that stakeholders did not fully comprehend (Weisburg, 2017). Combined with budget cuts, new technology support positions in schools, and flexibility models, library media specialists were navigating uncertain times (Weisburg, 2017). This environment has implications for leadership within the role, with some library media specialists overwhelmed and uncertain, and others embracing the leadership role, as identified in state and local standards, needed to solidify the position and continue its impact on student success (Weisburg, 2017).

The Leadership Call

The first national leadership call for school library media specialists came from AASL (1969) when AASL joined forces with the Department of Audiovisual Instruction of the National Education Association to publish the *Standards for School Media Programs*. This collaboration represented a shift from previous AASL publications and marked the inclusion of technology as a key area of responsibility. In addition to the inclusion of technology, leadership was mentioned once, when media specialists were encouraged to "supply appropriate leadership in the educational process," (AASL, 1969, p. 7). The concept of leadership for school library media specialists was further developed in the influential 1988 text *Information Power*, in which school library media specialists were encouraged to take the lead in establishing partnerships, instructional planning, and technology (AASL & AECT, 1988). A decade later, in the 1998 updated version of *Information Power*, successful library programs were anchored in three core ideas: collaboration, leadership, and technology. Additionally, the phrase "leading from

the middle" was referenced in an effort to describe the type of leadership in which library media specialists should engage (AASL & AECT, 1998, p. 53).

By the 2000s, school library leadership went from being cautiously mentioned once in AASL's 1969 *Standards for School Media Programs* to an established core competency and expectation in AASL publications. In 2009, AASL published *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*, which positioned school library leadership within a rapidly changing, collaborative, global network connected by technology (AASL, 2009a). School library media specialists were called to be early adopters of new learning models that move away from the 20th-century industrial models of education in favor of interactive technology:

> School library media specialists must lead this revolution to make room for new models of teaching, learning, and organization to prepare learners for this collaborative environment and address the needs of a generation that has grown up participating, not just being broadcast to. (AASL, 2009a, p. 46)

Additionally, the call for leadership was emphasized as essential in order to preserve library media programs threatened by local staffing flexibility, diminishing budgets, and the advancement of technology specialists and instructional coaches (AASL, 2009a).

Shifts in national leadership expectations. AASL changed their approach to school library guidance in 2017 by combining different audiences into the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. In this most recent publication, six shared foundations guide the learner, the librarian, and the library program, but leadership was no longer an explicitly stated core value (AASL, 2017). In less than ten years, AASL went from encouraging library media specialists to

30

"lead a revolution" (AASL, 2009a, p. 46) to creating standards with only implicit connections to leadership (AASL, 2017). As a result, school library media specialists may lack clarity about the definition of leadership in their role today.

School Library Media Specialist Leadership in Georgia

Understanding the scope of leadership expectations and challenges, both nationally and locally, provides context for this proposed study and highlights the need to bring leadership stories to light in order to impact changes in school policies and practices. School library media specialist evaluation methods in Georgia, as well as information about Georgia school library media awards, presents additional background information about school library media specialist leadership in Georgia.

School library media specialist evaluation. At the same time AASL was calling for school library media specialists to be leaders in their 2009 guidelines, school library media specialists in Georgia were being evaluated using the Georgia Media Specialist Evaluation Program, an evaluation instrument the Georgia Department of Education developed in the late 1980s (Callahan & Reeves, 1990; Snipes & Frilot, 2019). There were significant differences between the national call for school library media specialists to be leaders and the outdated Georgia Media Specialist Evaluation Program, which made no mention of leadership (Callahan & Reeves, 1990). In 2014, a state-wide consortium of Georgia school library media leaders and university professors came together and created the Media Keys Effectiveness System (MKES), an updated evaluation instrument for school library media specialists that aligned with current evaluation systems for teachers and leaders and the AASL National Standards (Georgia Library Media Association, 2020c). The Media Keys Effectiveness System was updated in 2016 to become the

31

School Librarian Evaluation Instrument (SLEI) (Georgia Library Media Association, 2020c). The SLEI includes standards focused on program planning and administration, as well as instructional leadership, reflective of the 2009 AASL call for library media specialists to be leaders (Georgia Library Media Association, 2020c). More than 15 Georgia districts have adopted the SLEI to replace GMSEP (Georgia Library Media Association, 2020c). However, the Georgia Department of Education is no longer providing evaluation assistance to schools beyond the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) and the Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES) (GaDOE, 2020c). As a result, the majority of Georgia school districts continue to use the outdated Georgia Media Specialist Evaluation Program (Middle Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency, 2020). Though school library media specialist leadership was a national focus for AASL, leadership in school library media specialists has not received the same emphasis in evaluations in Georgia.

Georgia school library media specialist awards. There are two comprehensive state-wide awards that school library media specialists can apply for in Georgia: the Library Media Specialist of the Year Award and the Judy Serritella Exemplary Library Media Program Award (Georgia Library Media Association, 2021b). The Library Media Specialist of the Year is co-sponsored by the Georgia Library Media Association and the Georgia Association of Instructional Technology and is designed to "recognize K-12 library media specialists with dynamic, innovative programs and whose instructional collaborations foster student engagement and achievement," (Georgia Library Media Association, 2021b). The Library Media Specialist of the Year Award has three tiers: school-system level winners, regional winners, and one state-level winner (Georgia

Library Media Association, 2021b). The judging rubric for the Library Media Specialist of the Year Award was updated in 2016 and included leadership as a category (Georgia Library Media Association, 2021b).

The Judy Serritella Exemplary Library Media Program Award recognizes "library media programs that empower students to be critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information both in vision and in practice," (Georgia Library Media Association, 2021b). The Judy Serritella Exemplary Library Media Program Award was sponsored by the Georgia Department of Education from 2002 to 2012 (Georgia Library Media Association, 2021b). The Georgia Library Media Association and the Georgia Library Association co-sponsored the award from 2013-2018, and since 2019 the Georgia Library Media Association has solely sponsored the award (Georgia Library Media Association, 2021b). The Judy Serritella Exemplary Library Media Program Award rubric was also revised in 2016 and included leadership as a category (Georgia Library Media Association, 2021b).

Leadership Constructs

The approach to leadership, as well as the continued learning of leadership skills, has a direct impact on the leadership growth of library media specialists. This section contains a discussion of leadership theories most applicable to school library media specialists, as well as information about how and when library media specialists learn about leadership in their role. Additionally, exploring the shift from management to leadership sheds light on how library media specialists define leadership. Lastly, the notion of school culture is considered, as it can have a significant impact on how a library media specialist can act as a leader.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership happens when leaders motivate employees to care about the organization's larger mission and purpose (Bass, 1990; Brown & Treviño, 2006). Employees feel connected to the organization and work for the benefit of the group and not just their paycheck or a system of rewards and punishments. Bass and Riggio (2006) outline that leaders show transformational leadership in their regular interactions with employees through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Brown and Treviño (2006) state that transformational leadership has an ethical component and includes four main behaviors: 1) caring for employees; 2) acting with integrity by aligning behavior with moral principles; 3) weighing ethical consequences of decisions; and 4) acting as ethical role models for others. Transformational leaders are change agents focused on the greater good of an organization or program (Smith, 2014).

Transformational leadership has extended from the business world to K-12 school leadership. Leithwood and Sun (2012), in their studies of transformational leadership in school environments, have shown that this type of leadership is successful in managing change in schools by having a direct positive effect on teacher behaviors, student achievement, and school culture. School leadership teams that embrace transformational leadership can be particularly effective for school library media specialists and their collaborative programs (Haycock, 2017). According to Haycock (2017), embedded in transformational leadership is the confidence and commitment of a school leader to a vision, as well as the leader's ability to engage colleagues in associating their own personal identity with the shared vision. Haycock (2017) states: "For many teacher

34

librarians, the most prized is transformational leadership, where they are working with administrators to develop a climate for change and a culture based on collaboration and mutual respect," (p. 1).

The five practices of exemplary leadership as defined by Kouzes and Posner (2017), while not specifically focused on education, encapsulate discernable transformational leadership behaviors and actions. The five categories and ten commitments presented in Table 2 provide categories of leadership that may aid in conceptualizing the types of leadership enacted by library media specialists.

Table 2

The Five Practices and Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership

Model the Way	1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values.
	2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.
Inspire a Shared Vision	3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
	4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.
Challenge the Process	5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve.
	6. Experiment and take risks by consistently generating small wins and learning from experience.
Enable Others to Act	7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.
	8. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.
Encourage the Heart	9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
	10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

35

School Librarian Leadership Theory

Library and information science lacks specific theoretical underpinnings for research (Buschman et al., 2010; Everhart & Johnston, 2016). When researchers are focused on school library media specialists and their programs, theories are commonly borrowed from K-12 education and educational leadership (Everhart & Johnston, 2016; Haycock, 2017). The work of Everhart and Johnston (2016) was the first that explored a theoretical framework to support the characterization of school library media specialists as educational leaders. The goal of their meta-ethnography was to "go beyond the traditional summarizing of the research in the area to synthesizing and reinterpreting published findings for the purpose of building a foundation on which to construct a theoretical framework for school librarian leadership" (Everhart & Johnston, 2016, p. 3). For their study, Everhart and Johnston (2016) defined school librarian leadership as "the ability to influence and inspire others to meet identified goals or to share an identified vision (p. 2).

Everhart and Johnston (2016) chose six studies to help achieve their goal of building a theoretical framework for school library media specialist leadership, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Six School Library Media Specialist Studies

1	Everhart, N. & Dresang, E. T. (2007). Integrating research results and National Board certification standards into a leadership curriculum for school library media specialists. *Journal for Education in Library and Information Science 48*(4), 272–83.
2	Smith, D. (2009). Self-perceptions of leadership potential: A study of teacher-leaders educated to be school library media specialists who lead. (Order No. 3399240) [Doctoral dissertation, Florida State University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
3	Everhart, N, Mardis, M. A. & Johnston, M. P. (2011). National Board-certified school librarians' leadership in technology integration: Results of a national survey. *School Library Media Research 14*, 1-20.
4	Johnston, M. P. (2012). School librarians as technology integration leaders: Enablers and barriers to leadership enactment. *School Library Research 15*, 1-33.
5	Mardis, M. A., & Everhart, N. (2014). Stakeholders as researchers: A multiple case study of using cooperative inquiry to develop and document the formative leadership experiences of new school library professionals. *Library and Information Science Research 36*(1), 3–15.
6	Kang, J. H. (2015). *The leadership role of school librarians in the adoption of digital textbooks: Evaluating school librarians' stages of concern in Florida and South Korea* (Order No. 3705845) [Doctoral dissertation, Florida State University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Note: Adapted from "A Proposed Theory of School Librarian Leadership: A Meta-Ethnographic Approach" by N. Everhart and M. P. Johnston, 2016, *School Library Research* 19, pp. 5-9. Copyright 2016 by School Library Research.

Theoretical sampling was used in an effort to highlight and connect constructs and narrow to these six studies (Everhart & Johnston, 2016). All six studies had common topics, including school library media specialist leadership, and were conducted in

connection with the iSchool at Florida State University. After extensive analysis to better

understand concepts and relationships, Everhart and Johnston (2016) synthesized the

studies into a conceptual framework and a foundation for building theory.

In addition to the concepts previously discussed in the conceptual framework,

Everhart and Johnston (2016) explored the relationships among concepts, a necessary

step for developing theory. Anchoring school library media specialist leadership are the

three interrelated and evolving concepts of confidence, communication, and relationships,

as shown in Figure 1 (Everhart & Johnston, 2016). The concepts of growth and resistance

are on an axis representing that leadership can thrive due to mentorships or personal

drive, but also encounter both external and internal resistance to developing as a leader.

Through this exploration of concepts and how they are related, Everhart and Johnston

(2106) created five propositions, as shown in Table 4. These propositions address the

four behavioral components of the conceptual framework: leadership engagement,

leadership skills, leadership development with peers, and leadership mindset.

Table 4

Five School Library Media Specialist Leadership Propositions

1	**Proposition 1:** Education can provide a leadership skill set to bolster confidence for the growth of school librarian leadership.
2	**Proposition 2:** School librarian leadership growth is influenced by school culture.
3	**Proposition 3:** Peers contribute to school librarian leadership growth.
4	**Proposition 4:** School librarian leadership growth requires a specific mindset.
5	**Proposition 5:** School librarian leadership engagement follows traditional leadership patterns and is resistant to forms of leadership that require taking risks.

Note: Adapted from "A Proposed Theory of School Librarian Leadership: A Meta-Ethnographic Approach" by N. Everhart and M. P. Johnston, 2016, *School Library Research* 19, pp. 22-24. Copyright 2016 by School Library Research.

As the first and only study to focus on a theory of school library media specialist leadership, Everhart and Johnston's (2016) development of a conceptual framework is the foundation for my proposed qualitative research into the lived experiences of school library media specialists as leaders.

Leadership Dispositions in School Library Media Specialists

Considering the dispositions and personality traits of library media specialists can provide insight and context to the stories of those who are successful leaders. Jones and Long (2019) grouped the dispositions of library media specialists into three broad categories: thinking, relational, and motivational. These disposition categories can provide a framework for considering how personality and preferences intersect with leadership skills.

The thinking dispositions include attributes like lifelong learner, flexible, creative, and problem solver (Jones & Long, 2019). School library media specialists that excel in thinking dispositions, according to Jones and Long (2019), have been described as educators who can seamlessly and frequently change course as needed, as well as easily navigate many needs at once. Additionally, it is critical for library media specialists to be proactive, have a vision for the library media program, and be willing to change and adapt the vision as new needs develop (Kimmel et al., 2012). Thinking dispositions also include advancing along the continuum from "facilitative to flexible" by "moving from

working within the structure to changing the structure itself" (Kimmel et al., 2012, p. 11).

Library media specialists also know how to prioritize needs to maximize educational impact and simultaneously build relationships, an example of the relational dispositions (Jones & Long, 2019). Relational dispositions thrive in school cultures that embrace distributed leadership, a theory Spillane (2006) described in three principles: the practice of leadership is the main focus; leadership is distributed among leaders, followers, and situations; and the situation defines leadership and leadership defines the situation. By creating safe and inviting school library spaces, consistently presenting a helpful tone, and communicating effectively with all stakeholders, library media specialists build relationships (Jones & Long, 2019; Kimmel et al., 2012). In turn, success in these relational dispositions increases the school-wide impact of the library media specialist (Jones & Long, 2019). When a school principal creates an environment that allows for multiple leaders, the relational dispositions of library media specialists can develop and thrive (Johnston, 2015).

The rapid advancement of technology provides an avenue for library media specialists to function as change agents and motivate others to adopt new practices (Jones & Long, 2019). In the motivational dispositions category, library media specialists seek opportunities to stay informed about new technologies and how they, as library media specialists, can use new technologies to positively impact instruction and achievement. The elements of transformational leadership as a motivational disposition can be traced in embracing, implementing, and motivating others to use educational technology and the participatory web (Smith, 2010).

Leadership Education

While AASL has largely called upon library media specialists to act as leaders over many decades, graduate programs in school library media have lacked coursework focused on the explicit development of leadership skills (Shannon, 2008). School library media programs tend to center on library media program management and collection development. Pre-service and new library media specialists have reported that they see themselves in more of a support role than the leadership role described by AASL (Vansickle, 2000). Locally in Georgia, a survey of school library media specialists from 14 school districts revealed that they ranked program administration as the most important leadership role (Martin, 2011). However, there is a difference between managing a program and effective leadership:

> Due to limited feedback from peers and supervisors, the uniqueness of the teacher librarian job, and the ability of librarians to rule a library kingdom largely of their own making, many librarians do not realize that leading a library program is not the same as effective educational leadership. (Ray, 2018, p. 27)

If leadership is explicitly addressed in graduate programs, it is most commonly approached through the lens of instructional leadership and technology leadership. Analyzing how library media specialists are educated about leadership can lead to better understanding about why they choose to act as leaders in their role, or why they refrain.

In tracing the development of school library media leadership in AASL documents, leadership is regularly tied to the instructional role of the library media specialist (AASL, 1969; AASL & AECT, 1988; AASL & AECT, 1998; AASL, 2009a). Graduate programs incorporate instructional leadership by focusing on how instructional

collaboration develops between library media specialists and teachers across grade levels and content areas (Moreillon, 2013). By encouraging pre-service school library media specialists to collaborate with each other on assignments in their graduate courses, as well as providing direct instruction about how to engage in successful collaborative relationships, graduate programs enable school library media specialists to engage in instructional partnerships that build their capacity as an instructional leader.

Technology has long been established as an area of responsibility for library media specialists and has developed into an area where library media specialists can exhibit school leadership (AASL, 1969; AASL & AECT, 1988; AASL & AECT, 1998; AASL, 2009a). In 2006, Project LEAD enrolled 30 pre-service school librarians and was the first school library media master's degree program in the U.S. to focus on leadership development (Smith, 2010). Graduates of this program reported that they developed leadership skills that enabled them to feel confident about their positive impact as a school leader. By emphasizing educational technology and the participatory web, the school library media specialists in Project LEAD learned the tenets of transformational leadership. Deep knowledge of educational technology integration provided these pre-service school library media specialists with a foundation to work as change agents and leaders in their schools.

Beyond graduate school, library media specialists explore leadership through personal learning networks and professional learning opportunities. The rapidly changing nature of technology drives library media specialists to seek out professional learning in an effort to keep up with the demands of technology leadership and the evolving role of the library media specialist (Deissler et al., 2015). Technology itself is used to connect

and collaborate with other library media specialists and technology leaders, an especially beneficial pursuit since the role of library media specialist is most often a singular role in each school building (Biagini & Morris, 2019). Through these networks and learning opportunities, library media specialists explore and build their instructional leadership and technology leadership capacities (Trust et al., 2018).

From Management to Leadership

As noted earlier, many library media specialists believe that they practice effective school leadership by managing their library program well (Martin, 2011). However, effective leadership for library media specialists must extend beyond program management to include vision, collaborative relationships that extend beyond teachers, a desire to lead, and particular dispositions (Johnston, 2012; Jones & Long, 2019). Understanding the ways library media specialists can act as leaders beyond program administration provides specific context for this proposed study. Technology provides a natural way for library media specialists to engage in leadership, from serving on technology committees to guiding staff and students to adopt new practices and improve digital literacy skills (Johnston, 2012). Moreover, when library media specialists participate in school leadership committees, they learn how other leaders make decisions, participate in the decision-making process, and feel valued for their expertise (Johnston, 2012).

In addition to developing leadership skills through participating in leadership committees, library media specialists benefit from mentors, such as a district school library coordinator, an experienced library media specialist, or a school administrator (Everhart & Johnston, 2016). Regular support from other educators who have

successfully developed strong leadership skills can build leadership confidence in library media specialists. The feedback provided by mentors can be instrumental in examining practices and refining leadership skills, especially since library media specialists are often the only one of their kind in the school building (Ray, 2018). Furthermore, relationships with other school librarians in local professional learning communities and online professional learning networks provide opportunities for library media specialists to both be leaders and learn from others (Everhart & Johnston, 2016).

School Culture

School culture can be described as the way the members of a school work together and incorporate shared beliefs, values, and assumptions (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2019). School culture can also be characterized as the "personality of the building" (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2019, p. 1). The culture of a school often has a direct bearing on the leadership growth and impact of a school library media specialist (Zmuda & Harada, 2008). As school culture can have a significant impact on the ways in which a library media specialist can act as a leader, this section is designed to help better understand what constitutes school culture.

School administrators often lack understanding of the full instructional scope of a library media specialist (Lewis, 2020). Administrators who are open to learning about how a library media specialist can impact student achievement and teacher effectiveness provide a pathway to instructional leadership for library media specialists (Lewis, 2020). This openness is indicative of a distributed leadership model within which library media specialists can grow as leaders and be prominent members of school leadership teams (Zmuda & Harada, 2008). Additionally, according to Zmuda and Harada (2008), school

administrators who emphasize the importance of teachers working regularly with the library media specialists create a collaborative culture in which a library media specialist can thrive.

School culture can be a barrier to leadership in school library media specialists if the culture is anti-collaboration (Johnston, 2012). A lack of support, including administrators passively or actively working against the library media specialist, can be a significant roadblock in creating a library media program where the library media specialist can act as a leader. Administrators who operate in a top-down approach, are resistant to change, have had negative prior experiences with a library media specialist, or resist distributed leadership create school cultures that challenge the instructional leadership role of the library media specialist (Johnston, 2012; Lewis, 2020).

Conclusion

School library media specialists are expected to serve in many more capacities since Mary Kingsbury became the first professionally trained school librarian hired over 200 years ago (Woolls, 2003). In this literature review, designed to give context for this proposed study, I have provided a grounding in leadership research and the study of leadership in library media specialists. The goal of the proposed study is to fill a gap in the existing literature and provide school library media specialists and educational stakeholders, such as administrators and college professors, with new understandings about the practice of leadership in the role of the school library media specialist.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The leadership call has been heeded by some library media specialists and ignored or viewed as unattainable by many (AASL, 2016). This reluctance to lead, or lack of knowledge about how to lead, can be detrimental to school library media programs, especially in lean budget years or in times of local school flexibility (Weisburg, 2017). As school library impact studies have shown, students consistently perform better academically in schools with strong library media programs led by a certified library media specialist (Gretes, 2013; Lance & Kachel, 2018; Scholastic, 2016). In the current literature, leadership standards and guidelines for library media specialists are addressed, but there is a need for stories of leadership in practice (Weisburg, 2017). To address this need, I used narrative inquiry to illuminate the leadership experiences of library media specialists, as well as provide new perspectives for increased understanding and practice.

Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research focused on the first-hand personal experiences of participants in story form (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2015). For researchers, the appeal of narrative inquiry often aligns with a desire to "imagine, discover, or create new and better ways of living," (Bochner & Riggs, 2014, p. 198). Understanding personal experience through the lens of narrative inquiry and analysis has gained momentum in the past several decades (Czarniawska, 2004; Squire et al., 2014). As Merriam (2002) stated, "The story is a basic communicative and meaning-making device pervasive in human experience; it is no wonder that stories have moved center

stage as a source of understanding the human condition" (p. 286). Leadership is a complicated construct (Branch-Mueller & Rodger, 2019; Jackson, et al., 2015; Winston & Patterson, 2006), and narrative inquiry provides a way to honor lived leadership experiences and bring to light the nuanced nature of library media specialists leading from the middle. I collected and analyzed the stories of award-winning library media specialists, guided by these three main research questions:

1. How do award-winning school library media specialists define their leadership role?

2. How do award-winning school library media specialists perceive they demonstrate leadership?

3. How do award-winning school library media specialists build their capacity as leaders?

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) brought narrative inquiry into focus in the educational environment when they sought to use a narrative approach to better understand the experiential knowledge of teachers. John Dewey's philosophy of experience was the foundation for Connelly and Clandinin's work in educational narrative inquiry. As Clandinin (2013) noted: "Dewey's two criteria of experience — interaction and continuity enacted in situations — provide the grounding for attending to a narrative conception of experience through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space with dimensions of temporality, place, and sociality" (p. 12). Thinking narratively about the lives of the teachers they were studying, as well as the school and its contexts, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed a narrative inquiry approach focused on three

main aspects of lived experience of educators that can be described as social, continual, and situational:

> People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context. The term experience helps us think through such matters as an individual child's learning while also understanding that learning takes place with other children, with a teacher, in a classroom, in a community, and so on. (p. 2)

Additionally, there is a continual aspect to experience that must be considered in narrative inquiry, in that experiences grow out of previous experiences and impact future experiences. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted, there are phenomenological roots in narrative inquiry, with its clear emphasis on experience, but the interaction of the social, continual, and situational elements of experience makes the narrative inquiry approach unique and fitting for this study.

The main goal of this study was to analyze and share the leadership stories of successful library media specialists, bridging the gap between library media leadership standards and the lived professional experiences of library media specialists as school leaders. The goal of this study aligns with narrative inquiry and its emphasis on lived experiences and story as data (Patton, 2015). Each library media specialist has a unique leadership experience and story to share that may benefit others in the profession, as well as provide educational stakeholders with effective examples of library media specialists as leaders. The three aspects of experience as defined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) — social, continual, and situational — are fundamental to narrative inquiry and the foundation of this research study. Additionally, the role of the researcher in narrative

48

inquiry goes beyond collecting and retelling the stories of study participants to analyzing story data for patterns and themes, creating meaning from their experiences (Bloom, 2002; Patton, 2015). Furthermore, analyzing these narratives can bring forth information not always shared outside of the culture of the group (Quinn, 2005). The research protocol for this study was exempted from IRB oversight (see Appendix A).

Participants

The population of this study consisted of library media specialists in Georgia that have won a state-wide award, such as Library Media Specialist of the Year or Exemplary Library Media Program of the Year. In Georgia, the judging rubrics for both of those awards were updated in the latter part of 2016 to include leadership as a category (Georgia Library Media Association, 2021b). By narrowing the focus from all Georgia library media specialists to those who have won state awards, the pool of potential participants was smaller, but the probability of leadership skills in these participants was greater. Additionally, I focused on Georgia award-winners from 2017 through 2021, since those award years encompassed an explicit leadership component in the judging rubric.

To select participants for this study, I used purposeful sampling as a selection strategy in order to intentionally choose participants who could share information that is pertinent to qualitative research questions and goals (Maxwell, 2013). As Patton (2015) further explained, "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selection of *information-rich cases* for in-depth study" (p. 264). The strategy of purposeful sampling helped to identify participants with extensive information to share about their leadership experiences as library media specialists. Library media specialists who have won state-

wide awards were the best participants for this study, since they had already examined their work as a library media specialist through a leadership lens.

Selection Process

To begin the participant selection process, I contacted the Georgia Library Media Association to confirm the number of Georgia library media specialists that won regional or state Library Media Specialist of the Year and/or Exemplary Library Media Program between 2017 and 2021, the years where leadership was a focus in the award application and rubric (W. Cope, personal communication, August 8, 2021). A total of 68 library media specialists earned these awards during the defined five-year time span; seven library media specialists earned both awards. The Georgia Library Media Association sponsors these awards and confirmed the names and contact information for each winner during the defined time period. For this study, six participants were chosen to provide informative stories about leadership in Georgia school library media specialists in a variety of settings.

The Georgia Department of Education (2020a) has divided Georgia into 16 regions. These 16 regions are served by Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs) (Georgia Department of Education, 2020a) and the Georgia Library Media Association (2021a). Regions consist of a geographic cluster of counties as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Georgia Map of Regions

1. Northwest Georgia RESA
2. North Georgia RESA
3. Pioneer RESA
4. Metro RESA
5. Northeast Georgia RESA
6. West Georgia RESA
7. Griffin RESA
8. Middle Georgia RESA
9. Oconee RESA
10. Central Savannah RESA
11. Chattahoochee-Flint RESA
12. Heart of Georgia RESA
13. First District RESA
14. Sowthwest Georgia RESA
15. Coastal Plains RESA
16. Okefenokee RESA
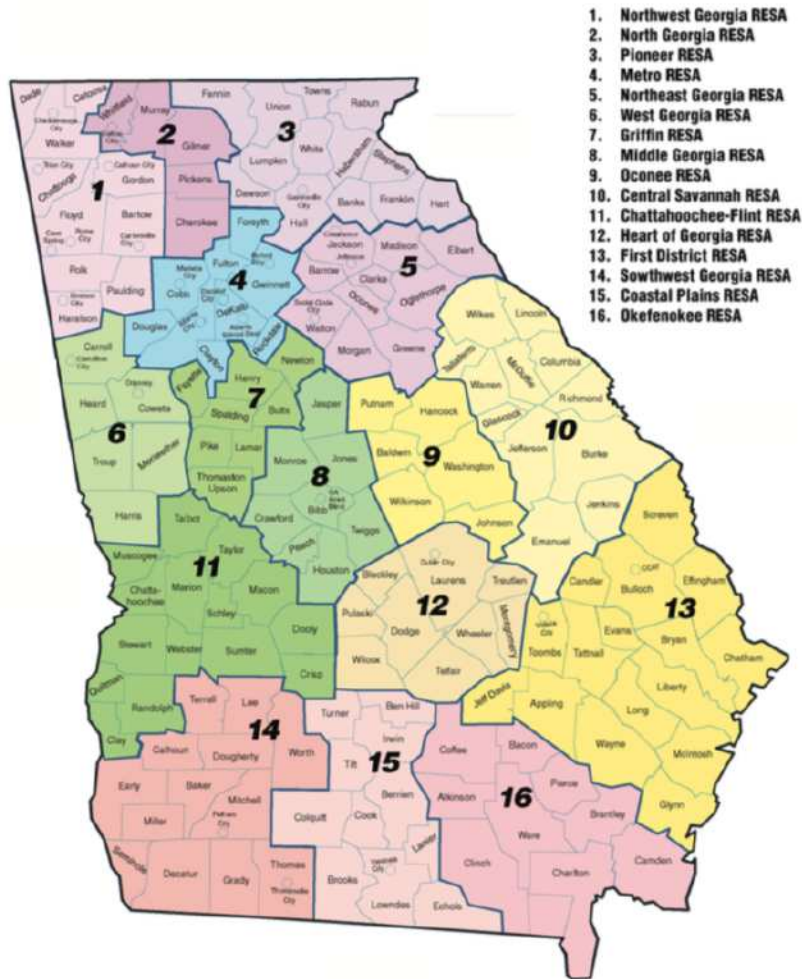
Note: Reprinted from *Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs): Georgia Map* by Georgia Department of Education, 2020a (https://www.gadoe.org/Pages/Regional-Education-Service-Agencies-(RESAs).aspx).

Each of the 16 Georgia regions can submit one library media specialist each year as a Regional Library Media Specialist of the Year winner; one library media specialist will earn the title of Georgia Library Media Specialist of the Year (Georgia Library Media

Association, 2021b). The Exemplary Library Media Program application includes a

question about the applicant's region, but the award is not limited to one winner per

region (Georgia Library Media Association, 2021b).

I emailed each of the 68 winning library media specialists and identified myself as

a researcher from Valdosta State University (see Appendix B). The email included a

description of this study, the requirements of winning either Georgia Exemplary Library

Media Program of the Year or Library Media Specialist of the Year. I included what they

might expect as a participant, as well as my contact information so that they may ask any

clarifying questions. I asked for a response stating they are interested in participating

within one week. Within the one-week timeframe requested in the initial email, 24

Georgia award-winning library media specialists responded to the survey.

To narrow the participant group to six participants, I chose two library media

specialists to represent each school level — elementary, middle, and high school — in

order to collect impressions and perceptions at each school level and represent the

breadth of K-12 experience. To capture this information, I included an online

questionnaire (see Appendix C) with the initial email referenced earlier. The participant

eligibility questionnaire also included questions that asked potential participants to

identify their award status, school level, school district, school enrollment, school setting,

and number of years as a library media specialist. The information collected in this

questionnaire was used to curate a range of Georgia award-winning library media

specialists with varied experiences.

In addition to selecting participants that represent each school level, participants

were chosen to represent one urban, one rural, and one suburban school setting, at a

minimum, in different Georgia regions. The next layer of participant criteria to examine was school size, selecting one small (up to 600 students), one medium (600 to 1,200 students), and one large school (over 1,200 students) at a minimum. Using these criteria, six participants were chosen representing six different Georgia regions. By using purposeful sampling and the outlined criteria, I was able to focus specifically on the leadership of library media specialists within different school environments, thereby studying a broad scope of leadership experiences.

Once the six library media specialists were identified, I reached out to them via email to officially invite them to participate in this study (see Appendix D). This communication included more details about the proposed study, the anticipated time commitment, data collection and management policies, and confidentiality. This information was included as directed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and is also in Appendix E. Potential participants reviewed the information and all six decided to participate in this study.

Data Collection

The goal of this qualitative research study and the interview process, specifically, was to capture the experiences of library media specialists that have shaped them into leaders, as well as examples of leadership in practice. Interviewing within a narrative inquiry approach, as Patton (2015) stated, "revolves around an interest in the life experiences as narrated by those who live them," (p. 434). In order to collect this information, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with each participant (Seidman, 2013). The three-interview series "allows both the interviewer and participant to explore the participant's experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning,"

(Seidman, 2013, p. 20). Each interview was a 60-90-minute virtual session, recorded, and initially transcribed using Microsoft Teams.

The structure of conducting three interviews with each participant aligned with my proposed research questions and the exploration of identified topics. Each of the three interviews had a particular focus and covered specific topics. Following Seidman's (2013) guidance on the spacing of interviews, each interview was scheduled to take place within five days to a week apart. A one-week gap between interviews, according to Seidman (2013), provides time for both participant and researcher to reflect on the previous interview, but not so much time that the connection between interviews is lost. There was one exception to this timing, due to one participant forgetting about a scheduled interview; that spacing was two weeks apart instead of one. Additionally, Seidman (2013) noted that working together within a span of two to three weeks typically has a positive impact on the relationship development between the participant and the researcher. Furthermore, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated, "the way an interviewer acts, questions, and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the ways participants respond and give accounts of their experience" (p. 110).

The first interview was designed to explore how participants came to be award-winning library media specialists (see Appendix F). Seidman (2013) advised interviewers to construct the first interview by asking participants to "tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time," (p. 21). By establishing a professional life history in the first interview, the participant's experience can be placed in context (Seidman, 2013).

In the second interview, open-ended questions were designed to encourage participants to explore their current leadership experiences and skills as a library media specialist. Emphasizing current experiences about the topic of the study aligns with the focus of Seidman's (2013) second interview by reconstructing experiences. In the third and final interview, participants were asked to "reflect on the meaning of their experience," (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). Seidman (2013) goes on to state that in this interview the open-ended questions are constructed so that participants explore the "intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life," (p. 22). The third interview had an explicit focus on making meaning of the participants' work as library media specialist leaders, with the previous two interviews providing needed context (Seidman, 2013).

The interview questions aligned with the research questions of this study and are included in Appendix F. The format of these three interviews supports the goal of exploring and understanding the experiences of the library media specialists that helped shape them as leaders. Additionally, this three-interview series provided opportunities for relationship-building with participants, as well as the exploration of moments where they define themselves as leaders, what leadership means to them, and how they continue to build their capacity as leaders.

Field Notes

In conjunction with interviews, I created field notes to collect information that may not be recorded in the interview (see Appendix G). Field notes are descriptive in nature and can capture behaviors and actions that further develop themes and insights in qualitative study (Patton, 2015). I described the setting of the interviews, non-verbal

55

communication, and social interactions, being intentionally descriptive, specific, and detailed. Additionally, I included my own reactions and reflections as a part of the field note data. According to Patton (2015), "the observer's own experiences are part of the data," (p. 388). The insights and ideas that are generated in field notes are identified as such and included as data (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

Data analysis began as soon as the first interview was completed, as Maxwell (2013) recommended not letting data accumulate so that it becomes overwhelming. Maxwell (2013) noted, "the experienced qualitative researcher begins data analysis immediately after the first interview or observation and continues to analyze the data as long as he or she is working on the research" (p. 104). Rather than separating collection and analysis into two phases, I stayed motivated and productive by analyzing data as it came in.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions of interviews were completed as soon after the interview as was possible in an effort to analyze data throughout the collection process, rather than waiting until all data is collected (Maxwell, 2013). I reviewed and analyzed recorded interviews and transcriptions throughout the seven-week data collection period, a design decision and an ongoing process that aligns with qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013).

In this first phase of data analysis, I listened to the interviews a second time to ensure accuracy in the transcription. I also reviewed my field notes during this initial phase of data analysis to expand any abbreviations and confirm notes were detailed and

clear. Patton (2015) encouraged researchers to begin analysis while still in the field by noting and recording "emergent patterns and possible themes" (p. 523).

The next phase of data analysis was to reduce the text, a process described by Seidman (2013) as winnowing data down to what is most significant and thought-provoking. This process was done inductively, as "the researcher must come to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeing what emerges as important and of interest from the text," (Seidman, 2013, p. 119). I used brackets to identify the transcription sections that were the most interesting in order to reduce the text (Seidman, 2013).

After reducing the text, the next phase of data analysis was coding, defined by Saldaña (2016) as identifying "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 4). For the first cycle of coding interview transcripts, I used descriptive coding, defined as identifying the topic of a section of data; descriptive coding is a method well-suited to interviews and field notes (Saldaña, 2016). Descriptive coding is not simply an abbreviation of the content but is a way of identifying the topic in a passage. By applying descriptive coding to the interview transcripts, as well as field notes, topics started to emerge from the data.

In addition to the first cycle coding method of descriptive coding, I used focused coding as an additional coding method suited for qualitative data. Focused coding is a second cycle coding method defined as searching "for the most frequent or significant codes to develop the most salient categories of the data corpus" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 240). This type of coding requires decisions to be made about initial codes and how they fit in analyzing the data.

57

After two cycles of coding, effectively breaking down the interview transcripts into smaller parts, I shifted my analytic focus to look for connections in the data, an analysis method defined by Maxwell (2013) as connection strategies. The goal of revisiting the connecting strategies was to avoid ignoring the connections in the data after applying a categorical structure (Maxwell, 2013). I examined the data for relationships that linked statements within context. Maxwell (2013) further elucidates: "contiguity-based relations...involve juxtaposition in time and space, the influence of one thing on another, or relationships among parts of a text," (p. 106). The goal of identifying connections in the data aligns with the narrative analysis approach (Maxwell, 2013), as well as the broader research questions of this study that center on how library media specialists work as leaders. Through coding the data and implementing connecting strategies, I was able to answer the research questions and develop a cohesive picture about leading from the library.

Credibility

Even when qualitative researchers design and follow all research steps correctly, there is no guarantee that conclusions are valid (Maxwell, 2013). Researchers must employ additional means to ensure the validity of results, since validity is known to be one of the key issues in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013). As the single researcher for this proposed study, and an award-winning Georgia library media specialist myself, I am very close to this subject matter and highly invested in the findings, especially as a district and state-wide school library leader. I acknowledge my preconceived notions about library media specialists as leaders as a potential source of bias. Maxwell (2013) defines this as subjectivity, a threat to validity that could impact my interviews, data

58

analysis, and conclusions. To address this validity issue, I asked for a thorough review of my interview questions from my dissertation committee to ensure they are not leading questions. Additionally, I stayed focused on my prepared interview questions during interviews to support the validity and reliability of this study. I also stayed cognizant of listening as much as possible and limiting my own amount of talk time. As Seidman (2013) noted, "listening is the most important skill in interviewing," and "the hardest work for many interviewers is to keep quiet and to listen actively," (p. 81).

Reactivity is defined by Maxwell (2013) as "the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied" (p. 124). Careful attention was placed on asking questions that do not lead participants in a particular direction. Furthermore, by using Seidman's three-interview series, validity is naturally enhanced through context, the number of participants, and by interviewing participants over a defined span of time (Seidman, 2013). Additionally, by creating profiles of participants that cite their own words, interview data is more transparent (Seidman, 2013).

I also developed credibility and enhanced validity through respondent validation, defined as "systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying," and also known as member checks (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). I provided participants with findings for them to review. Participants were encouraged to provide feedback and verification of the findings, which built trust between myself and participants and validated the findings.

To address validity further, I also focused on collecting thick, rich descriptions to aid in transferability (Maxwell, 2013). Interviews were recorded in both audio and video format, and verbatim transcripts were created from those recordings. I also crafted

detailed field notes that assisted in building validity. Field notes included information on the setting, nonverbal communication, and insights that might not be evident in the transcript (Patton, 2015). The field note guide template is included in Appendix G.

Lastly, I triangulated the data in an effort to further enhance the validity of this proposed study. Triangulation involves the "collection of information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128). I interviewed award-winning library media specialists that represent a diverse spread of school levels (elementary, middle, and high schools), geographic regions throughout Georgia, and school population size.

Conclusion

Many years ago in an undergraduate film class, I was introduced to filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard, who said, "Sometimes reality is too complex. Stories give it form," (Pastorelli, 2019). I have circled back around to this statement many times over as a language arts teacher and library media specialist, as I explored stories with others as a way of making sense of the world. I have thought of it again as I have considered qualitative research, and narrative inquiry specifically, as a path to answer my research questions. Exploring the complexity of the work of library media specialists, along with the complexity of leadership, aligns with the goals of narrative inquiry in understanding and valuing experience (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative inquiry goes beyond the simple recounting of a story toward a complex "collaboration between researcher and participants," (Clandinin, 2013, p. 17). As I acknowledged and embraced my own experience while systematically engaging with the experiences of others, I was able to fill

gaps in understanding and in the existing literature by collecting, analyzing, and sharing the leadership stories of school library media specialists.

Chapter IV

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Six Georgia school library media specialists, all of whom have won at least one state-wide award, participated in this research study, as shown in Table 5. All participants were actively engaged during interviews and spoke confidently of their professional experiences as a library media specialist. The following profiles provide a brief biographical sketch of each participant. Profiles can provide "an effective way of sharing interview data and opening up one's interview material to analysis and interpretation (Seidman, 2013, p. 122). To respect the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms have been used and names of places have been removed.

Table 5

Participant Profiles: Library Media Specialists

	School Level	Georgia Region	School Environment	School Size	Award(s)
Beverly	High	Metro Atlanta	Suburban	Large	Exemplary Library Media Program; Library Media Specialist of the Year
Toni	High	Coastal	Rural	Large	Library Media Specialist of the Year
Harper	Middle	Northwest	Rural	Medium	Library Media Specialist of the Year

Grace	Middle	North	Suburban	Large	Exemplary Library Media Program
Louisa	Elementary	West Central	Urban	Small	Library Media Specialist of the Year
Jane	Elementary	Northeast	Suburban	Small	Exemplary Library Media Program; Library Media Specialist of the Year

Participant: Beverly

Family is very important to Beverly. She grew up in a very close-knit family with her mom, dad, a brother, and a sister in suburban Atlanta. Both of Beverly's parents were teachers; her mother taught elementary school, and her father taught high school chemistry before moving into a career in business.

Beverly has been the full-time library media specialist at her high school for over 10 years. She married her high school sweetheart, and now they have three young children. As a family they enjoy learning new things, with topics that run the gamut from history to computer science. Beverly and her husband enjoy hiking as well. They are very close with their extended families and spend a lot of time with them. Beverly's older sister is an elementary teacher, and her brother is an accountant.

As a young student, Beverly enjoyed school, learning, and reading. When she was a first grader, Beverly remembers being asked to draw a picture of what she wanted to be when she grew up. "I actually drew myself as a librarian in front of books because I loved to read. I still have that picture that I framed." In addition to loving books, Beverly was

63

eager to please her teachers, and very driven to get all A's in her classes in elementary and middle school.

> I wasn't…the smartest in the class, but I was probably one of the hardest workers…I was really driven by doing everything right, by completing everything required. In fact, my mom would often tell me to put my homework down and go outside because I was always doing homework or reading.

Being driven did not prevent Beverly from having positive school experiences that shaped her life-long passion for education and learning. Elementary school was a pivotal time for Beverly, and a time she remembers fondly due to influential teachers and meaningful connections with peers.

By middle school, Beverly's affinity for school started to wane. "I loved elementary school, middle school, not so much. You know, you know hormones and everything." In high school, Beverly started to question the point of some of her high school classes and found a better fit as a dual enrollment student at a nearby college. By the time she was a senior, she was a full-time dual enrollment student. Beverly's early introduction to college motivated her to once again be a driven student. She began to see the purpose in her learning, care about her assignments, and work quickly through her courses.

Beverly did not initially pursue the career of librarian she drew in her first-grade drawing. Since she liked being with little kids and thought teaching would be fun, she wanted to teach elementary school. While working in college and planning to one day be an early education teacher, she started subbing in elementary classrooms. Beverly quickly realized that this was not the environment for her, yearning for more mature

64

conversations and a more intellectual relationship with students. After finishing her associate degree in early childhood education, Beverly immediately began working on her master's degree in English education. Her goal was to build on her love of reading and stories, discover ways to engage older students in discussions, and learn how to teach writing.

After graduating, Beverly officially began her career as an English Language Arts teacher with junior and senior students. "I was 21 years old, and they gave me seniors, and I had a 20-year-old in my class. It was very awkward…My first year of teaching was very difficult." After her first year, Beverly began pursuing a master's degree in library media while continuing to teach full-time. She was prompted to begin another degree by the library media specialist at her school who sent out information about a cohort group starting nearby. Intrigued by earning another degree and learning more about the school library media specialist role, she enrolled in the program.

After five years of teaching high school students as an English Language Arts teacher, the library media specialist at Beverly's school transitioned from full-time to part-time, and Beverly transitioned to a part-time English Language Arts teacher and a part-time school library media specialist. After a year, her co-library media specialist retired, and Beverly took over the school library media specialist position full-time. Beverly was grateful for the full-time opportunity, since splitting her responsibilities left her little time for planning and preparing lessons.

In the school library as a library media specialist, Beverly explained she feels as though she has found her best professional fit. "I'm needed by so many different people….I'm useful and helpful…I enjoy it so much more than being in the classroom."

Beverly focuses on striking the balance between the myriad roles of library media specialist, especially books, technology, and working with her principal.

Beverly's Site

Beverly's library media center is in a high school in a suburban area in metro Atlanta. Beverly's high school has over 3,000 students and over 150 teachers. Currently, Beverly is the sole library media specialist and has been for almost 10 years, though in previous years there have been two full-time library media specialists. Beverly has a full-time library media clerk. Beverly's school also employs a full-time local school technology coordinator and a full-time technology support technician. The school's student population is diverse, has a high graduation rate, and consistently scores above the Georgia state averages on end-of-course tests, as well as the SAT and ACT (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). Her high school's overall performance is higher than over 80% of the schools in the state of Georgia (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019).

The library media center in Beverly's schools is a very large space near the front of the school building. It includes windows that let in natural light and a tall atrium in the middle of the library. The circulation desk is close to the library entrance, and the walls are painted in a neutral beige accented with bright school colors. The furniture is very modern and well-kept. Beverly's library media center includes a desktop teaching area, several high-top tables for student work, as well as soft seating. There is a second, separate teaching area that includes tables and chairs on casters, allowing the area to easily shift to meet instructional needs. Library shelving, book displays, and areas for both collaborative groups and individual study are located throughout the space.

Participant: Toni

Toni's father was very intelligent, had an "engineering brain," and was always tinkering with electronics. He spent his career in the military. Her mother was a nurse turned stay-at-home mom after having children. Toni remembers her enjoying crafting, reading, and sewing. Toni has one sister who was also very smart and interested in the medical field from an early age. As a family, they often camped, fished, and took trips to Disney World. Toni's father passed away shortly after she graduated high school. Her mother never dated or remarried, and Toni describes her as "very self-sufficient."

Toni loved books when she was young and has fond memories of book fairs and enjoying reading. However, in her teenage years Toni mostly used "Cliffs Notes" and notes passed down from friends instead of reading assigned novels. She enjoyed school, and was very good in math, but was an average student due to a combination of a curious nature, procrastination, and being distracted by other things outside of her academic classes. As a fifth grader in her small southern town, Toni was tapped for an internship in the guidance office. She was given responsibilities and a significant amount of independence for her young age. Toni commented about the positive experience, "I always enjoyed the office work aspect…I've always loved organization."

Toni felt pressure about what she would choose as a career as a result of her successful and intelligent family. She visited with her high school guidance counselor and told her what she really wanted to do was teach. Her guidance counselor said, "You're too good at math to be a teacher," and encouraged her to find a different path that made more use of her math abilities. As a result, Toni went to college in a nearby city "kind of floundering" as a math major. Additionally, when Toni's father passed away

67

right after Toni graduated from high school, Toni struggled through college for those first couple of years. Eventually, she dropped out.

Toni continued taking classes "here and there" over the next several years at technical schools: "I liked taking classes, but I just didn't know where I wanted those classes to go. I didn't have a direction for them." During this time Toni met her husband, who was in the military. They moved to the west coast, and Toni worked for the Navy in administrative capacities. Once they started a family, as well as knowing that her husband would soon receive orders to move again, Toni decided to resign her position and stay home with their children.

Toni, her husband, and her five children moved back to the east coast to Georgia when their kids were young. Once the oldest reached school-age, Toni started going with him to school and volunteering at every opportunity. Being back in the classroom environment had her thinking, "I really want to be in the classroom. I really want to teach." Toni took additional classes and rediscovered her love of literature, thanks to an influential literature professor: "I remember her name too…she taught… all the literature classes. A lot of Shakespeare classes. And I just really liked her. So, then I started taking every class she offered." Toni graduated in general studies, due to her love of both math and literature.

After obtaining her general studies degree, Toni wanted to earn her teaching certification, too. She wanted to work with middle grades because she had five children, and her husband was in the military and would leave for months at a time. Middle grades was an obtainable degree that helped her balance earning teaching certification and taking care of her family.

I did have to drive to [a nearby city] a couple nights a week to take some classes at [a local college] for my certification. But in elementary, you were required to do student teaching, and there was no way I could do that. And because of the subjects and stuff that I had…since neither of them were geared towards one subject area, it was kind of split between the two…middle grades was just the easiest one to get.

This practical reason for earning middle grades certification seemed somewhat disingenuous to Toni but pursuing her teaching degree while balancing a family was her priority, so middle grades certification was a good fit.

Toni's first teaching position was an opportunity presented to her by the principal of the elementary school where Toni had been volunteering and subbing. The day before school started, the principal called Toni and offered her a job teaching special education. Toni was surprised, but agreed, and became a brand-new special education teacher the first year the school was establishing a push-in collaborative teaching model. Teaching special education during this challenging time provided Toni with experience with collaborative relationships in the classroom.

So, the year I started teaching was the year they started collaborative classes in our district. And…it was a little difficult for me coming in because before then everything had always been self-contained. And so, when I started, we [teachers] really weren't given much direction other than, 'This is [Toni]. She's going to be teaching the special education students, but she's collaborative, so she has to be in your class.' And it started with third grade. Well, needless to say, the third grade teachers about had a fit because you know, that was at that time that was 2005 and

so there was so much coming down on the teachers as far as the CRCT scores and…third grade was the first year everything counted…So, the teachers were not very welcoming to the idea of collaboration because previously the special education teachers would pull out and the special education teachers were fully responsible for those students. So, the first couple years…I ended up having some broken friendships. It was really hard.

As a special education teacher in a small, rural school of about 350 students, Toni was without a predetermined group of colleagues. "So, I started going to the library during lunch and talking to the media specialist there and she was like, 'You need to be a media specialist. It's the best job in the school.'"

When a regular education teaching position became available at the nearby middle school, Toni took the opportunity to use her middle grades certification. The rural middle school had three grade levels and about 1,500 students. With her background in collaborative teaching, Toni was assigned to work with a special education teacher and the hearing-impaired teacher, a time she remembers fondly: "The hearing-impaired teacher, the collaborative teacher, and me all in the classroom with a bunch of students… and we had so much fun. We really had a good time."

During this time, Toni kept thinking back to the elementary library media specialist's comment about it being the best job in the school. While teaching middle school, Toni earned another degree, this time focusing on technology and library media education. When a library media specialist position opened up at the local high school, she interviewed and was offered the job. Toni found it difficult to leave the traditional classroom due to the close relationships she had formed with her students and staff, but

70

she was excited about a new path that provided more opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and engage students.

> I've always liked helping teachers find resources, and even in the classroom...A lot of the teachers I worked with still had those sideways Xerox copies that they had been using for 10 years. I was the one that was like, 'Hey, let's find something new…' I think that's probably what drew me in more than anything was the technology and knowing that, you know, we had to keep up with the curriculum, keep it going to keep the interest of the students.

Toni's Site

Toni's school library media center is in a high school in a rural area. There is a ninth-grade center that functions as its own school-within-a-school, complete with a library media center, a library media specialist, and a library media clerk for just the ninth grade center. Toni and her colleague, another full-time library media specialist, as well as a full-time library media clerk, serve grades 10-12 in a different building on campus. Toni's high school is a large school and the only one in her district, serving over 2,500 students. The high school has had one-to-one devices for several years now, with a large portion of the day-to-day troubleshooting and maintenance centered in the library media center. Toni's high school is also a Title I school, defined as a school "with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families" (United States Department of Education, 2018). The school's student population is majority white, has a very high graduation rate, and consistently scores above the Georgia state averages on end-of-course tests, as well as the SAT and ACT (Governor's Office of Student Achievement,

2019). Toni's high school's overall performance is higher than over 90% of the schools in the state of Georgia (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019).

Toni's library media center is located near the front of the main school building and directly across from the front office, providing relatively easy access for students. There is only one entrance and exit to Toni's library media center, allowing for clear monitoring of the flow of students and staff in and out of her space. Inside Toni's library media center there is an area for tables and desktop computers, an instructional area with an interactive board, and shelves for books. The library media center has fresh paint with accent colors, and the carpet and furniture are in good shape. In addition to the areas mentioned above, Toni's library media center also includes access to a computer lab with glass windows.

Participant: Harper

Harper was born and raised in Tennessee but has lived in Georgia most of her life. As a child, Harper loved to play sports, including softball, volleyball, and basketball. Doing well in school was important to Harper so that she could continue to play sports. She enjoyed elementary school, especially math, as well as reading books like the Hardy Boys series, but by high school she was no longer a reader. "I enjoyed reading in elementary school, but they kind of turned me off of it after…junior high and into high school with all the mandatory reading." Harper's required reading included mostly classics that seemed far removed from her own contemporary experiences. At home, Harper's parents were not book readers. "Who knew there were actual books that you might actually enjoy reading, you know, but nobody tells you…I didn't have that in my life. My dad read newspapers. My mom was into magazines."

72

Harper is now married with two children and two young grandchildren. She is very proud of both her children who have moved out on their own and have successful careers that allow them to work from home. Harper and her husband, who she describes as an avid reader, are now "empty-nesters," and they love to travel both internationally and within the United States. Harper has been the library media specialist at her middle school for over 15 years.

Harper originally went to college to study math. Her father convinced her to pursue a degree in accounting since she loved math so much. Harper quickly realized accounting wasn't for her and changed her major to high school math education. However, her professors weren't communicating the material effectively for Harper, and she went to her advisor for a solution. Harper was told that if she changed to middle school math, she would need fewer math courses and could have different professors, which sold Harper on the move. "I…aced business calculus and went on to teach middle school, actually social studies and science…because you know your first job, you never get hired for what you actually want. You're just happy to have a job."

After two years teaching social studies and science in a west Georgia school district, Harper moved northwest to her current district. She got a job teaching math and coaching, both of which she had been yearning to do. At this time, she was pursuing a master's degree in math due to her love of math and, at the time, she was able to have her degree tuition paid for if she earned a math degree and taught math for two years. During her coursework, she took a reading endorsement class as an elective and learned that she did not want to teach reading. When she took a library media elective, however, she found it fascinating.

Harper went on to finish her master's degree in math and teach math for another two years enabling her to have her tuition paid in full. Three weeks before the end of the school year during that final required year of teaching math, her school library media specialist told Harper she was leaving her middle school library position to take a position at a college library. Harper applied for the school library media specialist position noting that the "job just seems like a natural fit for a math person…putting stuff in order…organizing things. That's a mathematically minded thing." As a math teacher though, Harper admits that she didn't have a lot of interaction with the school library media center or the library media specialist. In the interview process, Harper's principal was more concerned with students' experience in the library media center than how well things were organized. "I had no idea what our library was really like. [The principal] said, 'I want you to draw people into the library. I want kids in there. I want as many people in there as we can.'" Harper was up for the challenge and has "not looked back since." As the library media specialist, she remarked that she has learned she can "really make a difference school-wide."

Harper's Site

Harper's middle school is in the northwest region of Georgia. There are about 900 students that attend her rural school. The school's student population is majority white, and more than 70% of eighth grade students are reading at or above the grade level target (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). The middle school's overall performance is higher than over 60% of the schools in the state of Georgia (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). Harper works with a full-time library media clerk.

The library media center in Harper's school is near the front of the school building and directly across from the cafeteria. Beige walls have been brightened up with vibrant colors and designs throughout. Contemporary, flexible furniture is available for the students among the traditional library shelving. There is a flexible teaching area that includes mobile tables, three whiteboards, and an interactive panel. The library media center is student-friendly and encourages exploration, creativity, and collaboration in its signage and materials. A robust makerspace is a focal point of the library media center and provides students with multiple opportunities to explore using no-tech, low-tech, and high-tech supplies.

Participant: Grace

Grace grew up in a tight-knit family consisting of her mom, dad, and brother in rural north Georgia. Grace enjoyed school, had lots of friends, and describes herself as a high achiever. Grace's family would take trips to the public library in the summer, but during the school year she went to the school library. She was active in extracurricular activities through her school years, and especially enjoyed being in the band. As a young child, Grace remembers "playing school" often, and she was always in the role of teacher. Grace's pretend role of teacher eventually evolved into the role of librarian. "I used to play librarian and check out all my Little Golden Books…my brother was really into wrestling…so I checked books out to Rick Flair…those were the people that came into my library when I was a kid."

Grace graduated from college as an early childhood education major. "I did my student teaching in first grade and that was the last time I set foot in a school until I became a librarian." Instead of taking a teaching job after graduation, Grace worked for

her sorority for a year as a leadership consultant. It was a job that was highly selective, so when Grace was chosen, she decided she could not pass it up. "I remember somebody told me…'If you don't get out in that first year, you will not get out.'" The leadership consultant position required a lot of travel to different college campuses. Grace had planned to either go to grad school or get a teaching job once her leadership consultant position contract ended. "But the more that I traveled, I was like, hmm, maybe being a flight attendant for a year would be good…wouldn't that be a fun job?" Grace ended up as a flight attendant for the next 18 years.

Grace is now married with two school-aged children of her own. After getting married, Grace decided she wanted to be at home more. It just so happened that one of the flight attendants that Grace flew with regularly was in the process of getting her degree to be a public librarian. The more Grace talked with her the more interesting it sounded, so Grace enrolled in a program that allowed her to be employable as either a public librarian or school library media specialist. During her school library internships, Grace expected to love elementary school the most. "I was terrified of going to the middle school. I was like, 'This is not going to be good.' And then I realized those were my people."

After graduating, Grace found it difficult to find a school library media specialist position since she had not been a classroom teacher or worked in a school yet. She got hired part-time at a public library and continued to work as a flight attendant as well. The following school year Grace applied for library media paraprofessional positions and got one at a high school. When one of the three part-time library media specialists left the following year, she moved into that role. After two years as a part-time high school

media specialist, Grace took a full-time middle school library media specialist position in the district she had moved into.

Once Grace got to middle school, she felt like she was truly a library media specialist. Her high school experience had been shared among, at times, two other library media specialists. In middle school, she was solely responsible for the library program. Grace focuses on building positive rapport with staff and students. "It's the relationship building for me…because that leads to everything else, honestly. I think it's very important that we are… more than just what happens in the library." Grace uses her personality to inject fun into the program as a way of building community and relationships.

> I want the Media Center to be…the biggest part…of the school. We have dance party Fridays outside, and my book fairs are a huge deal. It gets the kids excited, but it also gives me a chance to…treat the teachers…In the fall, we had a circus themed book fair…we had a cotton candy machine and snow cones and hot dogs on the rollers and…I am extra. I just want the library to be the best place in the school.

Grace's Site

Grace's school is a large, suburban middle school in north Georgia. Over 1,800 students attend Grace's school. The student population is majority white, and more than 80% of eighth grade students are reading at or above the grade level target (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). The middle school's overall performance is higher than over 60% of the schools in the state of Georgia (Governor's Office of Student

77

Achievement, 2019). Grace works full-time as the library media specialist; she does not have a library media clerk or paraprofessional.

The library media center in Grace's school is a large, inviting space. Traditional library shelving is mixed with contemporary, flexible furniture, soft seating, and high-top tables. Laminate flooring has pops of color and rugs to define areas. Bright paint and large signs provide visual interest against beige walls. Grace rotates thematic, engaging decor throughout her space frequently, as well as in a large display window outside her library media center and throughout the school building.

Participant: Louisa

Louisa grew up in both Germany and the state of Georgia due to her mother's career in the military. During her mother's time off, Louisa and her mom would visit museums, zoos, and libraries. In total, Louisa attended 12 schools before graduating from a Georgia high school. Louisa's schools in Germany were much more advanced than her schools in Georgia, and attending multiple schools gave Louisa a unique perspective on how schools operate. Through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, Louisa has always defined herself as a reader.

> I was a reader that as far as I can remember; I remember reading, not that my mother read to me. I remember reading stories and asking…'is it the or T-H-E?' every time I was like, 'is it the or T-H-E? the or T-H-E?' So, she bought me a record player…and the books on records.

Additionally, Louisa remembers that libraries were an integral part of her education in both countries.

78

We were living in Germany. That's when I got my first library card when I was like, first grade. I remember going upstairs into the top of the library. I was like, 'How many books can you get?' And they're like, 'As much as you can fill in a paper bag.' I left with a paper bag full of books and I was happy.

By middle school she assisted in the school library and enjoyed being surrounded by books, even though she had some trouble keeping up with the ones she checked out. She also loved math. By high school she spent more time in public libraries than her school library. Louisa felt that her high school libraries were focused more on research, so she used those to work on projects and homework and went to the public library to check out fiction books.

Louisa's first career was in the military, where she spent eight years. She credits her time in the Navy as a Computer Operator as providing both background and context for the technology aspect of being a library media specialist. When her Navy career was ending, she attended her job transition meeting and heard someone mention the public library and was intrigued. However, Louisa wanted to be in schools, and she did not think that the school library media specialist was a certified position. Louisa earned her undergraduate degree in middle grades math and science, and then earned a master's degree in special education. "Then when I found out in my first year of teaching that the library was a certified position, that sealed it for me."

As a teacher, Louisa did not feel like the position was a good fit for her. Once Louisa walked into her elementary library media center, she thought "this is where I'm supposed to be." Louisa has been an elementary library media specialist for 15 years. In that time, she earned her doctorate in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in

instructional technology. After 15 years in elementary, Louisa recently took a position at the local high school as the library media specialist when the previous library media specialist retired. Outside of work, Louisa likes to travel, as well as visit libraries and museums. In addition to her fondness for math and reading, she enjoys history and learning historical information in different places. Louisa is also very involved in multiple volunteer organizations serving her community.

Louisa's Site

Louisa's elementary school is a small, urban elementary school in west central Georgia. About half the 500 students at Louisa's schools are white and about a quarter are black. The school's overall performance is higher than over 20% of the schools in the state of Georgia (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). More than 60% of third grade students are reading at or above the grade level target (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). As the elementary library media specialist, Louisa worked full-time; most years Louisa did not have the support of a full-time library media paraprofessional or clerk.

Louisa's elementary library media center is centrally located in the main building on the same hallway as the cafeteria. Students often pass the library media center on their way to class, lunch, or the bathroom. The small library media center includes dark wood shelving and tables and chairs in the same wood tone. Stools in the same wood tone have colorful cushions on top. Natural light comes through several windows, and there is a large, colorful story time rug. There is no mobile furniture, but the space is rearranged depending on the needs for student activities, book fair, and other events.

Participant: Jane

Jane is the oldest of five children and grew up in an upper middle-class suburb in Georgia. Her family was into sports, but she describes herself as not very athletic. "With five children, there wasn't a lot of extra money to go around for the things that I enjoyed like dance and gymnastics." Her family went to church every Sunday and Wednesday. Jane and her siblings spent a lot of time playing outdoors, riding bikes, exploring the woods, and swimming at the city swimming pool. She remembers her childhood fondly.

Throughout childhood, Jane spent a lot of time in her school library. She preferred reading books to hanging out with friends. "The library was just kind of a safe place to hang out when you aren't a real social person…I liked reading, but I think I used reading as more an escape." For Jane, school was something she did because that's what she was supposed to do as a kid. She did not have a special affinity for school or a stand-out teacher that really influenced her. "I managed to pass all my…classes, but it wasn't like I had this great love of learning."

Jane is now married and has raised five children in a blended family. She has three daughters and two sons, and all are grown. When the children were younger, they enjoyed road trips and camping as a family. Jane stays close with her kids, is very active in her church, and is now a "dog-mom." She has always enjoyed reading children's literature for work but is excited to have more time to read books for herself as well. Contrary to her opinion about learning as a child, Jane has a different perspective as an adult. "Now I love learning new things…it's exciting and interesting."

Jane had always loved working with children and considered careers in psychology, education, and pediatric nursing. She began her college studies as a

81

psychology major but didn't feel like it was a good fit. She quit school for a while as she tried to figure out her career path. She credits her mom with helping point her in the direction of education. "My mom kind of pushed me toward teaching and I'm glad she did because I loved it. It was a perfect fit."

After graduating, Jane spent eight years as a third-grade teacher and was very happy with her career choice. "I loved it. I really did. I loved the relationships with the children. I seemed to connect with…the ones that were a little bit more trouble." Jane was also an early adopter of instructional technology and student use of technology. "I was really interested in incorporating technology into my classroom…I saw how much they loved it and how excited they were."

Jane took a couple of years off to be with her family, and, when she returned, worked as an early intervention teacher at a new school. At this time Jane also decided to go back to school and earn a master's degree. A colleague she was talking about grad school with mentioned that she was in an instructional technology program and that Jane would really like it. So, "on a whim" Jane decided to apply for the program. The application included a box to check for add-on library media certification. "And I thought, well, you know, why not? So, I click the box, and I said I'm never gonna be a media specialist. Little did I know."

The same year Jane decided to go back to school, her principal came to her to ask her to go back into a regular education classroom, be a lead teacher, and serve on several committees. Jane was hesitant because she was new to the school, working on her master's degree, and parenting young children at home. When Jane's principal inquired about her studies, Jane said her principal told her, "Oh, that's the degree you need to be a

media specialist. Our media specialist just turned in her letter of resignation. Do you want her spot?" Jane thought about it: "And the thought that went through my head was 'Sure, I can check out books while I'm doing my masters.' Because that's all I had ever seen." As Jane progressed through her program and worked as a library media specialist, she quickly learned that there was "more to this job than just reading stories; I can actually teach kids."

In 2017, Jane was hired at her current school, a brand-new school at the time. She was very excited about opening the library media center. She has focused her library media program as a transformation into library learning commons, expanding beyond the books into learning programs of all kinds for her students. She encourages her students to learn how to research, how to think critically, and how to find the resources they need.

Jane's Site

Jane's school is a suburban elementary school in northeast Georgia with over 600 students. The school's overall performance is higher than over 30% of the schools in the state of Georgia (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). More than 40% of third grade students are reading at or above the grade level target (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). About half the student population is white. Jane's elementary school is a Title I school, defined as a school "with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families" (United States Department of Education, 2018). Jane works full-time as the library media specialist and has the support of a library media paraprofessional or clerk.

Jane's library media center is centrally located in her school building, with fresh white walls, high ceilings, and dark patterned carpet. The library shelving is a light wood

tone, and furniture includes colorful tables on casters with updated seating. There is also

a large, colorful story time rug, as well as a STEM cart, a Lego wall, low gaming chairs,

and an instructional area. Jane's makerspace is a defined space in her library media

center, and students can use STEM materials throughout the library media center as well.

Chapter V

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to uncover how award-winning library media specialists perceive themselves as leaders, reveal how they enact leadership in their role, and bridge the gap between leadership standards and the lived professional experiences of library media specialists as school leaders. Six Georgia library media specialists participated in this narrative inquiry study, and each participant was interviewed individually on three separate occasions using Seidman's (2013) interview protocol.

The data was analyzed according to the methodology stated in Chapter III. I listened to each interview twice to ensure accuracy in the transcription. I read the transcripts and reduced the text down to what was significant and thought-provoking (Seidman, 2013). In the first cycle of coding, I used descriptive coding to identify topics. In the second cycle of coding, I used focused coding to hone in on the most important topics as related to the research questions, and then created a visual code map of all codes. After two cycles of coding, effectively breaking down the interview transcripts into smaller parts, I adjusted my focus to look for connections in the data, an analysis method defined by Maxwell (2013) as connection strategies. By analyzing the data through coding and connecting, the following themes emerged.

Themes

- Relationships
  - Relationship development
  - Barriers
  - Students
- Communication
  - Stakeholders
  - Communication strategies
    - Challenges
    - Reflection
- Dispositions
  - Confident
  - Creative
  - Motivator
  - Problem-solver
  - Flexible
  - Learner
- Leadership
- Continuing education

Discussion of Themes

Relationships

All participants reported that positive relationships were an integral part of their success as a library media specialist. The stakeholder groups of teachers and students

were identified by all participants as the top stakeholders for targeted and consistent relationship building. Participants reported mixed results with relationships focused on instructional collaboration, defined in this study as library media specialists working with teachers in planning lessons and/or teaching collaboratively. All participants reported that thoughtfully navigating difficult relationships led to favorable outcomes.

Relationship development. Toni discussed relationship building by stating, "I feel like our open-door policy is really what's built our relationships with students and admin and teachers…allowing them to see that we're willing to make the effort to have those relationships…and just being trusted and letting them know that we're here to help them." Each participant made comments similar to Toni's about the importance of being helpful, welcoming, and dependable. Jane, when asked about the environment in her library media center, said, "I think a lot of it is building the relationships and interacting with the kids. I mean, I can have everything in there, but if it was not a pleasant place to be and we were fussing at the kids and not inviting in our attitude and how we interact with them, they wouldn't want to be there." Additionally, Grace discussed relationships as the cornerstone of the library program she leads: "After six years, I've just built these relationships with the teachers, and for me, that's where it all starts. I focus a lot on that."

Participants reported developing and maintaining relationships with teachers in their school in a variety of ways. Grace, Harper, Beverly, and Jane spoke of participating in teacher meetings as a way to develop relationships and increase instructional collaboration. Harper stated, "I typically go to all of the meetings at the beginning of each year…all of the subject area meetings for teachers and introduce myself, especially to the new teachers, and…talk about things we have in the media center." Beverly described

87

what happens in meetings with teachers: "I would…listen to what they're doing and when they talked about projects, that's where I would get excited. I'm like, oh, we…could do this kind of choice board. We could use this tech tool." Collaboration in teacher planning meetings leads to co-teaching lessons according to these same four participants. Teachers brought their students to the library media center for lessons co-taught by the library media specialist and the teacher together. Beverly spoke of continued collaboration throughout the instructional day by reflecting between classes: "The teacher and I would, at the end [of the class], go through the lesson together. 'Alright. What worked? What didn't work? What can we tweak?' We were constantly doing that. Not just like when the project was over, but when first block [class] ended. 'Ok, what do we change for the next block?"

In addition to attending teacher planning meetings, participants discussed finding other ways to develop instructional relationships, such as finding one teacher to collaborate with regularly. Grace commented, "I do have a go-to teacher. We like to shoot for the stars…so we've written a couple grants together. We started a podcast because she wanted to do podcasts with her kids.…where they would interview people and experiences because she's a history teacher." Harper stated that having one teacher that is willing to try new things is advantageous, and that is who she goes to as a "catalyst" for collaboration with other teachers. Harper and Jane both mentioned that they sometimes work through the students to build instructional partnerships with teachers. Jane said, "I taught some kids how to write their own digital books using Book Creator [an online program]. Once I taught some of the kids, the teachers were like, 'That's so cool.' And I'm like, 'Look, can I show you? Can I have like 15 seconds of your time? I'll

88

show you how to do it.' So sometimes I have more success getting the kids hooked first, and then bringing the teachers on board." Technology, such as the podcast example from Grace and the digital book example from Jane, was discussed by all participants as an area of expertise that library media specialists use to bolster collaborative relationships with teachers.

Barriers. Participants also discussed barriers to building positive relationships with teachers, such as curriculum requirements, additional responsibilities, and school culture. Louisa, Toni, Jane, and Grace agreed that the curriculum itself can be a barrier to instructional collaboration. Grace spoke about her county's curriculum, noting that teachers are given lesson plans and timeframes, so students are doing less research than in previous years as a result of less flexibility in how teachers teach. Jane had similar comments: "My biggest challenge is…our county's curriculum. It doesn't fit well with project-based learning. And, you know, I get it. When you're trying to cover a couple hundred years' worth of history in eight months, you're going at such a fast pace…I see the teacher's challenge. They're like, we don't even have time to teach the standards we're supposed to teach. We don't have time for the kids to research and create because it would take them a solid week. And we don't have a week to spend on a standard. So that's been frustrating."

The culture of a school can also have an impact on instructional collaboration. For Toni, the teachers at her school were not interested in collaboration. She stated, "We don't do a lot of collaboration with teachers in…lessons. We've had a few instances of it. They just are not real open to…bringing their students down, or us coming to their classroom. So, when they come use our space…we kind of insert ourselves in and…walk

89

around and help. We don't really do a whole lot of direct collaboration with teachers like I would like to do." Beverly noted that Covid-related changes have led to a decrease in her instructional collaboration: "The teachers just don't want to come out and play anymore…they have their lessons online now. They're very much set in their ways." Harper was frustrated by being denied by her principal to speak to teachers in large group settings, such as professional learning meetings. She said, "I would love to have time during the professional learning time - just five minutes. And to not even be given that… just told 'Teachers don't wanna know that' or 'We don't have time to fit you in for that.' And I'm like, but you do - you really do! I promise I won't take up much time. And I promise you'll have a more effective technology piece in your school if you just let me speak for a few minutes. But it's a struggle right now."

Participants also noted that being assigned additional duties led to decreases in instructional collaboration. Beverly said that the large amount of student laptops has required a significant amount of her time: "With all the laptop carts and having to build them and get all the Chromebooks in and then onboard the Chromebooks…that was time consuming, and I can't stop that and be like, alright, I'm gonna go collaborate with some teachers. That's something that was delegated to us this year. And you can't say no to that. That's important. Teachers and students need computers, but it does take away from collaboration, and there's other standards I'm supposed to hit as a media specialist, so it's challenging." Grace, who does not have any support personnel working with her, has to manage every need that comes into the library media center: "I was working with one teacher, and she said, 'I'd like to work with you more, but you get interrupted all the time.'" Additionally, Grace and Beverly both noted that staff turnover and the caliber of

new hires has altered their instructional collaboration. Beverly stated, "Over time here the quality of teachers has gone down significantly…People are still…recovering from what Covid did to them and there's a mental health crisis right now with the students and the teachers. It's just not a happy place like it used to be."

All participants discussed that navigating difficult relationships has been important in the success of the library program. Louisa discussed the challenge of helping her teachers understand that students should be able to choose what books they want to read rather than requiring them to choose books on their Accelerated Reader (AR) level. She used relatable explanations and data to help her teachers "think differently" about improving reading scores. Harper and Jane both mentioned that being flexible in their scheduling made a positive difference in teachers being willing to be instructional partners. Toni's humility helps her stay patient:

> People skills are really important right now…just to…talk people through things when they're upset. My job is important, and I know my job's important, but if it wasn't for the classroom teachers and the students…I wouldn't have a reason to be here. So…I remember that all the time. I can't get too frustrated because they're the reason I'm here.

Students. Developing relationships with students was identified as a top priority for all participants. Finding creative and relatable ways to engage with students was a common topic with all participants. Grace stated:

> I like developing new and engaging ideas for our kids. We can't just keep doing the old things all the time because our kids are changing. So, I stay on top of what

they are into and what helps them learn best and then help the teachers with what they need.

Louisa discussed that she works strategically on her book collection to make sure all students see books that are "windows" into another world, as well as "mirrors" where they can see themselves. Jane noted that she uses robotics and coding to engage students in building digital literacy skills and bridge the gap between using technology for fun and using technology to learn:

Everybody has this idea that kids today are digital natives. They know how to sit and spend time on a screen. It doesn't mean they know how to use it in a purposeful way. So, I think that one very important skill that we need to teach our kids is using technology purposefully to learn to create. To interact with others.

Harper also commented that she enjoys teaching students to use technology to build confidence and digital literacy skills: "I think that's the most fun part of my job…I get to teach kids things that they think are going to be extremely difficult. And when they realize it's not, they're like, 'Oh, ok, yeah, we can do this.'"

Participants spoke about creating an environment in their library media center where students want to be. Louisa stated that she strives to create "a culture where the students are free to share with each other, and collaborate, and learn, and take, and feel comfortable, and have ownership of the space…but also provide the resources they need, like the books, of course." Toni noted that simply letting kids know they are important helps build relationships with students:

Just giving them that positivity. 'Good morning,' or just being there if they need something, not ignoring them… I just enjoy the interactions with the students.

92

Whether it's research or whether it's helping with Google… just having those

opportunities to talk to the students themselves and…see where they are and see

what they're doing and how I can help.

Jane stressed the importance of having fun:

I've learned that it's really important to develop a relationship with the kids. One

way I found to be very successful with that is by having different clubs.…and

you've gotta make the environment fun. They're kids; if it's not fun, they don't

wanna be there…there's nothing worse than trying to convince a kid to do

something when they hate where they are. It's not gonna happen.

Harper tied a comfortable library environment to learning: "Not only do they need to feel

comfortable…but they also need to learn to ask things like 'I don't know how to use this.

Tell me how to use this.'" Harper mused that when students feel comfortable in the

library media center, they are more likely to be vulnerable, ask questions, and learn. She

stated, "So, I think teaching them how to ask questions is a very important part of what

we do."

All participants discussed developing relationships with students by providing

opportunities for students to have ownership of the library media program. Toni noted,

"I'm really proud of our tech program that we have. Work-Based Learning

students…help us with fixing the Chromebooks and help with different technical things,

and they put computers in classrooms." Jane delegates tasks to her students out of both

necessity and opportunities for student engagement: "I delegate a lot of stuff to kids. I

have student media helpers. And kids love tasks. You know they love to cut out stuff;

they love to run stuff all over the building." Harper provides opportunities for students to

93

take the lead in her makerspace with 3D planning and printing. Similarly, Louisa used her makerspace so that students can teach each other. "We had a button machine, and another student, because she had learned how to make the buttons…showed the other students how to use it."

Communication

Stakeholders. Participants identified students and teachers as the main stakeholder groups for building relationships, but a broader group was defined when asked about their strategies for effective communication. Participants identified students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members as the key groups. The communication strategies participants used varied according to the stakeholder group.

Communication Strategies. As library media specialists, participants said they communicate with large audiences, such as the whole school and/or school community. Toni stated:

> I think most of the parents…get their information from websites and social media. I feel like the more communication we have, the better off we are…It's just human nature…if you don't know something, you're going to think the worst. So, you might as well let them know and keep them informed.

When asked about what she chooses to communicate, Toni said, "I'm always trying to flip my hat to think, 'Ok, as a parent, how would I feel about this?'" Beverly and Grace also expressed that they use social media to keep stakeholders outside their school, such as parents and district personnel, informed about what is happening in their library media programs. Harper and Jane both use websites to keep stakeholders informed. Jane mentioned that her website serves an additional purpose: "I think it's really important to

94

have a robust website that…basically serves as an online library for the kids." Jane, Louisa, Grace, and Beverly mentioned that they use a messaging service, such as Remind or their learning management platform, to get messages directly to parents as well as students.

Within the school building, participants discussed broad communication techniques, such as using the closed-circuit system, the school news, and posters. These methods assist library media specialists in communicating with all stakeholders in the school building, such as students, teachers, and administrators. Jane, who leads her school's broadcast news student team, uses the platform to highlight announcements and events associated with the library media center. Beverly, Grace, and Louisa use scrolling announcements on the close-circuit television, as well as posters, to do the same.

Participants indicated that small group and individual communication is more frequent than large-scale communication and helps develop relationships. All participants discussed finding the best ways to communicate with different stakeholder groups. Beverly knows that her principal is very busy and finds that speaking face-to-face is helpful:

> I try to have a running list…like here are all the things I need to talk to my principal about, and then grab them when he's in a good mood or schedule an appointment with him, or just go stand with him in the hallway when he's doing duty…and I think he appreciates that I know how busy he is, and I don't want to take up his time.

Grace expressed a similar viewpoint, stating that emailing with her principal is not very effective, so she seeks him out for in-person conversations. Additionally, Grace stated

95

that she has some unusual requests due to her proclivity for brainstorming creative ways to engage students in her library program: "I ask for a lot of strange things, so I feel like it's better to…explain myself quickly. Like here's why I need this or why I need to do this. And before you can say no…" Toni also spoke of the benefit of quick conversations: "Our administrators, they're the office right across the window from us…so we see them all the time…it's more a drop in. They're open-door people so we can walk in there anytime."

Attending meetings is another form of effective communication that all participants discussed, especially with teachers in order to build collaborative relationships. Harper stated:

> Whenever they have grade level meetings, which is about once a month, I usually pick a different grade level and go to those…ask if they need help. And tell them everything that I'm willing to help with…I attend all the ELA meetings because they're the ones who usually need me most.

Beverly asked to be added to the language arts department emails as well:

> So I know what they're up to…then I can go to their meetings and lend a helping hand when they need it, or if they need resources or books. Or…for book groups and things like that, just being present and listening and constantly reaching out to them.

Jane misses the meetings she used to participate in: "Teachers, it's a lot of email right now. I try to grab people for conversations, but…it feels just too rushed." Jane looks forward to different circumstances in the future. "Next year, that communication will

include grade level meetings, and I'm really excited about that again. That's something I really missed during the Covid years."

All participants spoke of the benefits of communicating with individual teachers and students. Jane stated:

I also try to target teachers that are a little bit more innovative…that are willing to…take a risk and be more creative with things…I'll email them or go to them with a specific idea. And they're like, 'I love it. Let's do this.'

Harper noted that she communicates about specific, successful collaborations to build instructional relationships with others: "And sometimes I brag, especially in my emails…'Miss Smith tried this last year and…here's how it's changed or altered or gotten better this year.'" Harper has found this type of communication to be successful in creating new opportunities for collaboration. "So, I kind of throw it out there as somebody else has already tried this and loved it. You know, you could too! You don't even have to ask me. She's right down the hall from you."

Toni, Louisa, and Jane spoke about how being positive is an effective communication strategy for them. Toni stated:

We showed them how to do it [post assignments] so many times, but they still come over and ask us to do it. So, we're like, 'Sure we'll submit it. No big deal.' And…we always have the 'Oh, my printer's not working. Can you come check it? My smart board is not working. Can you come check it?' You know, so we go and restart some things or plug in things.

Louisa stated that she makes individualized positive interactions a priority by saying things like the following:

'I like your outfit; I like your hair.' If I see something good in somebody, I'm like,

'I like how you do that.' Or if I notice something, I'm like, 'Oh, what's that shirt

say?' That might carry a conversation…So I guess winning people over…by

noticing the things that they do with purpose….there's a reason why your nails are

painted…you want somebody to notice them.

Jane noted that knowing her teachers' weak spots helps her communicate about how she

can support them:

I've got some teachers that I know would love to do stuff, but they're terrified of

technology. And they'll tell me…'me and technology, we're just not friends.' And

I'm like, 'You know what? It's ok. Just bring your kids, and I will handle all the

technology and…teach you a little bit, too.' And they're like, 'Ok, I could maybe

do that.'

Challenges. All participants discussed barriers to effective communication.

Participants also discussed minor challenges that they have found ways around. Grace

tried creating a monthly newsletter about the happenings in her library media center but

did not have the time to keep up with it. Instead, she sends updates through the school's

digital communication avenues. Jane and Beverly purposely keep all their written

communication very short in order to increase the odds that it gets read. Harper, however,

discussed significant challenges when it comes to communicating with her staff:

"So [principal] used to let me come back from conferences, and he'd give me a

half an hour in a faculty meeting or…during a professional learning day…And

he's like, 'What did you learn? Show us.' It was just glorious compared to now,

where he's like, 'Just send it in an email.' I'm like, 'They'll never read it. Ok, well,

I can do that.' But it's very frustrating. My hands have been tied for a few years, and it's been a struggle to even get information to anyone, and that's not because of me not pushing.

Harper collected data on who read emails she sent out and who watched tutorial videos she created and discovered it was less than 10 percent of her staff. To navigate these communication barriers, Harper stated she works to develop individual relationships with her staff, as well as try to tap into interest areas: "My principal actually did give me a few minutes of time to show teachers [virtual reality]." Harper described the hands-on experience as an effective learning opportunity for the teachers: "So, we put them all in the headsets. We used their phones and that's when I got the most response. 'Hey, I can do this with classes?' And I'm like, 'Yes, yes, you can.'"

Supporting teachers through change and working with demanding people were additional challenges that participants discussed when speaking about communication strategies. Toni remembered helping her staff through a transition from laptops with DVD players to laptops without DVD players. She encouraged her staff to upgrade their laptops due to the benefits, but also provided a DVD player teachers could check out and told them where they could purchase one if they wanted:

At least they know the option so that…it makes them feel better even if they never purchase it. At least they know that I'm on their side, and I'm trying to help them. I'm not saying, 'You can't use DVDs anymore.' I'm saying, 'This is a solution.'

Beverly spoke about how she navigated working with a particularly difficult teacher:

There was a lady who just gave me such attitude, but by the end I just

kept…being as patient as I could. And just pretended like she was on an IEP

[Individualized Education Plan]. Honestly, that's kind of what I do when they're

mean to me…I need to treat this one differently…just instant, instant kindness.

So, I just continued to…go above and beyond and sit with her and struggle

through the software with her. And she eventually got a little nicer.

Reflection. Participants discussed how reflection helps them improve their

communication strategies. Jane stated:

I'm very reflective, especially at this time of year. And I always tend to start

planning for the fall and…I start sending out emails and people are like, 'Look, I

don't care right now. Can you talk to me about that in August?' So, I didn't send

emails to everyone. I only sent emails to my principal.

Similarly, Beverly notes that her communication style has changed over time, preferring

face-to-face conversations over email, as she finds in-person interactions more effective:

Now I just don't care if I'm not…perfectly eloquent when talking to someone

face-to-face, whereas back then I felt a lot of pressure…to sound super smart. So,

I would write all my emails out so I sounded polished, but they didn't read my

email because it was too long.

Dispositions

The responses to interview questions provided evidence of how participants

approach their work, as well as their temperaments. These behaviors and personality

traits are collectively described as dispositions. Confident, creative, problem-solver,

motivator, flexible, and learner were the dispositions identified in the participants' responses.

Confident. All participants spoke about their confidence increasing over time and with experience. Harper stated, "A lot of people are cocky when they're younger…and arrogance is not pretty. But confidence…you build over time and learning new things." Beverly spoke about the comparisons that can happen when library media specialists get together for professional learning: "I'm really hard on myself, too…I'll go to these media specialist meetings…And I came back, and I was just so defeated. I was like, gosh, I suck…my media center is horrible compared to hers." However, Beverly said that seeing how other library media specialists work is inspiring, too. "But then that motivates me to try to think outside the box and…constantly reinvent and constantly learn."

Harper and Louisa both spoke about their confidence growing when they realized that most people are also learners, that failure is part of the learning process, and that modeling how to handle failure for students was important. Louisa stated:

One of my biggest things was learning…not to be afraid to fail, to try again…and even if it doesn't work out how I think it's going to work it out…something else can come out of this…Maybe 'Oh, I didn't like the outcome, but I like what was learned from this experience.'

Jane spoke of pushing herself in order to build her confidence:

I was very comfortable in front of a group of children. I was terrified to get in front of a group of adults. And so, I started just making myself do it. I started applying to present at conferences. I still remember my first conference and how horrible it went. But I learned a lot from it.

Grace mentioned that her confidence has grown with experience and has allowed her to pursue new ideas: "I think just becoming more confident in your job also allows you to…be a bigger risk-taker because you know your job and now you know where you can step out and do other things."

Participants also discussed winning their award and how it served as a confidence-booster. Toni stated, "I've now realized that…I've got more to offer than what I thought previously. And so, I feel I'm more confident to voice my opinions and question things." Louisa mentioned that her colleagues took notice of the award and that it provided additional credibility to her work.

Creative. In addition to confidence, creativity was another disposition evident in participant responses. Creativity was revealed through participants' describing their innovative ideas, recounting ways of increasing student and teacher engagement in the library media program and identifying as a creative thinker. Grace stated, "My favorite part…it's really collaboration…That kind of encompasses everything, but working with the teacher to help plan lessons and what they need with their kids [is my favorite] because it gives me an opportunity to think outside the box." Grace also noted that she really enjoys graphic design, and that her creativity in that realm is helpful for marketing the library media program. Jane taps into her creativity in order to gain additional resources she can use with her students:

I have Chromebooks available now, but the school didn't provide me with any iPads…so you do have to be creative in how you obtain resources. It's not going to all come through state funding or county funding. But there's money out there if you just put a little effort into looking for it.

Motivator. The creative disposition and the motivator disposition are closely related. All participants spoke about the creative ways they motivate stakeholders to engage in the library media program. Louisa spoke about providing a wide variety of makerspace activities, games, and events to engage and motivate her students. She also involves students in the process, and spoke of one particular reading event:

> I asked a student…'What do you want to do?' 'I want to walk on a red carpet.' So, the first time we had some red butcher paper, which was so funny, because they were slipping and sliding on the red paper, but still, they walked down the red path, right? And then I showed my principal, and she got some red runner carpet, and I taped it together, so we had a real red carpet.

Harper, who once thought that makerspaces were "just toys," now has an active makerspace she uses to motivate her students to think differently:

> I love to do things that the kids have never done before…the 3D printer is a lot of fun. I let the kids do everything…They change out the color filament and they hit all the buttons and take it off the 3D printer…You gotta not be afraid of it and you have to try it.

Jane also has a 3D printer: "They…want to watch that printer. They love it. That's their motivation…They're like, 'Can I make something for my mom for Mother's Day and print it on the printer?'…And now all of a sudden, they're motivated to learn a program."

Grace uses school-wide experiences to motivate her students and create community, such as coordinating dance parties every Friday, organizing elaborate book fairs, and purchasing "read and ride exercise bikes" for the library media center. Jane creates engaging learning experiences, including coding robots with young students:

103

We program Santa Claus to bring presents to houses. I take masking tape and make a giant grid on the carpet. And we have reindeer…I'll use the BeeBots [coding robots] for it next year. I didn't have them at the time…I'll make a Santa suit for the BeeBots, but they program it…they have to program Santa to go deliver all the presents…that's the thing, it has to be something motivating to them. You know, they're motivated to help Santa Claus deliver presents.

Problem-solver. Another disposition that all participants discussed was being a problem-solver. Grace does not have any additional support personnel, so she has eased some library policies, built a strong volunteer program, and implemented self-check-out so students could check out books while she was teaching a class. Jane and Grace both spoke about using grants to help boost the library budget. Beverly discussed balancing a one-to-one rollout of laptops with maintaining her instructional program and having to make some tough decisions. Louisa helps those around her be problem-solvers, too: "I said, 'It'll be ok because everything is fixable. Well…most things are fixable. As long as there's no blood, we can fix it.'"

Flexible. According to Toni, one of the most important dispositions is being flexible: "I think that our role as media specialists is one that is constantly changing, and we have to change with it." Harper and Beverly made similar comments, noting that accepting change and even pursuing it helps them be successful library media specialists. Louisa also noted that flexibility is important for her and that she changes things up frequently, such as when the physical environment does not meet the needs of her learners. "This didn't work, let me try this…in the middle of the day, I would change something around. Like this table isn't working right here, let's move this around, maybe

104

it'll be better." Toni discussed how she has changed her approach to research to engage her students:

I think that even though we want to draw them into other sources, [such as] primary sources, we have to allow them to also explore…social media things, newer things. I can't stand it when people are like, 'No, no, no Wikipedia.' And I'm like, I don't know…I go to Wikipedia for things. I mean, it may not be…reputable in a paper or something, but you can start your research there by all means. I think that's something with students that we need to remember…we need to realize where they're coming from and the new things that they have access to. And we need to be open to those concepts.

Learner. All participants expressed a desire to learn as professionals. The learner disposition is evident in the way they discussed their own growth and how they strive to grow their library program. Harper stated:

I had been talking to a lot of my colleagues and a lot of other media specialists in my specialist degree [classes]. And they would tell me things that they did in their library. And I'm like, 'Ok, how can I do that? How can I incorporate that in my media center?' And I kept thinking about it.

Grace mentioned that "staying on top of all the new things" is an important part of the job. Jane noted that learning should never end: "You gotta keep growing. You gotta keep growing in all areas…If you haven't done anything to grow in a certain area lately, then it's probably time to revisit that."

Leadership

Participants were asked to discuss their thoughts on leading as a library media specialist. Within the context of leadership, participants also spoke about advocacy, influence, vision, school culture, leadership styles, and leadership development. To best represent each participant's leadership narrative, the results that follow are organized by participant.

Jane. Jane contributed to the leadership theme of vision. She is a member of her school's leadership team, as well as the language arts vertical alignment team. She looks forward to having a more flexible schedule next year so she can also attend grade levels meetings. She gave an example of her leadership by talking about how she convinces teachers to collaborate with her by getting students hooked on a tech tool first. "Then you start getting…teachers buying in and going 'Ok, that was a really cool thing….What's your idea for this,' you know? And it just kind of grows organically throughout the school." Jane spoke about the benefits of serving on committees in her school:

> When you serve on those committees, you can't just serve from your position…you have to think about the needs of the whole school. Sometimes there is something that the media [program] can offer, but then there's other times that we're working on rewriting our vision, mission, and vision statement for our school.

Noting Jane's expertise, her principal asked her to lead a technology committee next year in an effort to help teachers better integrate instructional technology into their day-to-day teaching. "So, I'm still thinking about that. She said it would be a big commitment. But

then that's another example of how she's seeing me as a leader." When asked if others seeing her as a leader was important to her, Jane stated:

> I guess that's…a quality that I've developed and value in myself. I don't know that I seek leadership roles. As much as you know, I always seem to end up in them. My husband has accused me for years of having 'helium hand.' He's like, if somebody says, 'Can you…?' your hand just floats up. But I guess I have kind of a servant's heart. I like helping. I like doing things for other people. And that lands you in charge of stuff quite often.

In addition to her school committees, Jane also serves on multiple committees in community organizations.

Jane also contributed to the theme of leadership development. For Jane, knowing when and how to speak up is an important leadership skill. Jane reflected about her committee work developing the school mission and vision statements:

> We had all these warm, fuzzy things, but nowhere in there did we address instruction. We had a great culture. But I…brought that up. 'I love that we have all this warm fuzziness and that we're inclusive. We want everybody to feel safe and…but I feel like a high expectation for instruction should be part of it somewhere.

Another example was when Jane was working with a former principal: "I had a principal one time that told me…'I need you to be my right-hand person. I need you to be like another administrator.'" Jane viewed her leadership role differently. "No, I'm not here to be an administrator….A leader in the school? Fine…But no, I don't need to be making

your curriculum decisions. I could give you feedback on stuff. But no, I'm not assistant principal part two."

Another leadership theme that Jane spoke about was advocacy. To help principals better understand the role of the library media specialist, including instructional leadership and the need for flexible schedules, Jane thinks more school districts should adopt the School Librarian Evaluation Instrument (SLEI):

I've tried to advocate for it in my own county and I feel like a lone island. Our principals…they're happy with us. Why rock the boat? And I'm like, because when you rock the boat, you make it better, you know, waves make things better sometimes. We're not trying to tip the boat over and throw people out, but let's make things better.

Jane also mentioned that library media specialists need direct instruction on leadership skills. "We need training on how to become a leader. Just because you work in a school doesn't mean you know how to be a leader." She goes on to say that leadership training is needed through ongoing professional learning and in graduate courses, too:

I think as we evolve as a profession, increasing leadership is going to be a natural byproduct. I think that library college programs should have more on leadership. Because I don't know that I knew anything about leadership when I got my degree. It was just something that I was supposed to do. But I really didn't know how to go about doing it….And I really don't think you can be an effective media specialist without some leadership skills.

Grace. Grace contributed to the leadership theme of influence. Grace's thoughts about her role as a leader in the school shifted after a teacher told her something that has stuck with her:

> I had a teacher say something to me…'I don't think you know how much influence you have…and how people perceive you…you don't even realize it.' I think we have a different relationship with administrators…and teachers, too….We also know everybody, and we probably know the people [school staff and students] better than the administrators know the people…Teachers are more apt to share with us than with administrators…That helps [us] get a pulse of the school and the culture. So, I think we can be very influential, and we probably don't know it, just like she said. And you gotta get out of the library, but you also have to be willing to ask because I don't think they're [administration] always going to ask you to be a leader.

Grace reflected that there is a part of being a library media specialist that brings people together and is a bit like being a "politician…shaking hands and kissing babies….It's a unique part of our job. I never even thought about the fact that people don't know everybody in the building." Grace did add, "I don't know if it's just me being involved or wanting to be a part of everything…or maybe it's the nosey side of me."

Grace also spoke about the theme of leadership styles. Grace has worked with three different principals in six years. She spoke about observing different types of leaders:

> We've had three principles and they've all put their desks in different spots in their office. The first…you couldn't see [the principal] was there unless you went in.

109

The second was turned so [the principal] could see out and everybody as they went by. The third is facing the wall so you can see [the principal] is there. And I think it really shows their different personalities.

Grace said about one of her principals, "She hired people to fit appropriately…In different grade levels she had…her finger on the pulse of where to put people…If they weren't right, they didn't last past a year…that's kind of tough, but that's how she was."

Grace also added to the leadership of school culture. Though not officially a part of the school leadership team, Grace did note one particular interaction with a principal when she asked to help at the educator job fair where new teachers are found.

Even the culture in the library, the culture with my teachers, I want to make that a certain way. I don't want to say anything negative, but some of our principals haven't known how to hire people. And that affects the culture. You know, if they don't fit just right…which is why I wanted to go to a job fair.

Grace considered her overall leadership influence and stated:

I feel like I have to fight to be seen as a leader from their [administrators'] perspective. But apparently teachers see me as a leader…and in the six years I've been here, I think it's [the culture] changed a lot. I think if you asked anybody, they'd probably say the same.

Grace believes her leadership has an impact on her school's overall culture. "So, to me, I feel like I have an influential part in creating the culture that I want to be a part of."

The leadership theme of vision was another topic Grace discussed. When asked about her goals for her library program and how they align with the school goals, Grace stated:

110

I feel kind of bad because I really have not had those kinds of conversations with the principal, like 'What can the library do to fulfill your goals?' So that kind of makes me feel like I should have been doing that and at the same time, I don't know that he would have a good answer. [He might] be like, 'Just do what you're doing,' you know?

Further reflecting on this topic, Grace said that her library and literacy initiatives often intertwine with school initiatives, even though she does often plan it that way. "So, one of our goals was more of like positive behavior incentives. And I did get the [book] vending machine that the teachers give the tickets out for positive behavior." Grace noted that she is not as intentional in this area of leadership as she would like to be. "So, it kind of feeds together, but it wasn't a conversation that we had like, 'This is why I want this because of this.' I need to have more conversations with him about that kind of stuff."

Grace has served in leadership capacities on multiple committees outside of her school. She has a clear vision for bringing her community together through events that involve multiple schools in her district.

I want our families to know who we are from the beginning, you know? So that's why we have these events that are together, and we show up together because that's giving us continuity…especially if you have a brother in middle school and a sister in elementary. 'Well, I'm gonna be your media specialist.' You're gonna know who I am already. Because we are making sure you know who we are.

Grace stated that one of her strengths is marketing. "You gotta market your program and yourself. But I feel like I am marketing our school, too… I do like to shine a good light on our school."

111

In addition to planning community events and marketing, Grace's vision includes embracing change. "When I came, it was a lot of shelves and not a lot of things other than bookshelves. So, I had a lot of things removed, like unused technology…to change those into the things that the kids do use." Once areas had been cleaned out, Grace added items to bring in more students. "I have read and ride exercise bikes and a green screen over there for kids to use….And then we've got our podcast equipment…adding things that kids are going to be more interested in and more apt to use."

Louisa. Louisa contributed to the theme of leadership styles. Louisa was very clear on the type of leader she is:

I'm a servant leader, so if I'm leading, I'm doing it first, and then showing how it's done, sharing ideas. I don't see it as a top-down type thing. I see it as a bottom-up. As a media specialist, we're leading students, guiding them toward books… answering questions for them and guiding them about how to work with different things. We're leading the teachers by helping them.

She stated that her leadership is "visible by my doing, more so than by my saying." When asked what type of leadership style she prefers in school administrators, Louisa said, "I like transformational [leadership] best…We're a team, let's get into this, let's figure this out." Louisa's vision for her library program aligns with transformational work as well:

I like to try new things and transformation is a vision. How are we going to make it work? How are we going to work towards this vision? And because you're transforming something…not that everything has been done is wrong, but…how do we make it better? How do we refine or tweak something…become our best selves? I think about what's best for the students and the people involved.

Additionally, when she started at a new school, she described the responses she got after making changes: "With the books I order, the environment I've set up, I hear, 'Oh girl, you made it such a welcoming environment.' That's what I keep hearing. Louisa commented that the environment she has created keeps people interested and coming back for more, saying things like "'This is so welcoming. People like being here. Look at all this traffic. Students are in here.' And when I put something out, people are like, 'Oh, let me go ahead and do it.'"

Advocacy was another leadership theme Louisa discussed. Louisa saw a need for library media specialists to be recognized in her area, so she led the effort to make awards and recognitions take root in her school library community:

> The first year there was a whole lot of people who applied, and I didn't get it,
> which was fine. I didn't do it for me, I did it for the media programs. I saw
> somebody and she said, 'I read your application. You have a lot of good stuff.'

Louisa applied again the next year after a colleague nominated her, and she won that time. She stated her reasons for applying again was "because it was this chance to share what I'm doing in the media center and so people can learn more about me." For Louisa, applying for an award was also about building community and sharing ideas: "If you're looking for someone who does literacy and this, check me out. So, I guess it was about advocacy and awareness of the program." Louisa stated that she believes she is viewed as a leader and a mentor among her library peers.

Louisa also added information to the theme of leadership development. Louisa served on her school's leadership team for 15 years but expressed that feeling like a

leader among the teachers in her school building was a bit more challenging than with her library peers:

> Some of my…coworkers…they did kind of question me less about my thoughts after I got the award. They're kind of like, 'Ok. Maybe she knows what she's talking about….' So maybe getting the award may have given me some credibility that I'm happy for, even though I'm the same person.

Louisa framed her leadership within the context of her role: "I'm not leading about something that another administrator's leading about. My leadership is what goes on in the media center and how it may affect the classroom…so I guess it's a different kind of leadership [than administration]."

Louisa serves on several committees and volunteers regularly with community and professional organizations. She believes that her leadership skills were largely developed outside of the school environment. "I think most leadership I've learned is from organizations and my volunteer work. And maybe on the job training, but mostly volunteer." She mentioned how one particular organization "has helped because it's a volunteer training organization…that's more catered to leadership. I don't remember any [graduate school] coursework on leadership." She notes that more should be done to build leadership skills in new library media specialists.

> When I first started 15 years ago, we were the media specialists…we were all leaders, advocates. Now it's some newer ones who are not quite sure how to implement something or who are waiting for directions and not as compassed. And now they're like, 'Oh my goodness, what have I got myself into?'

Toni. Toni contributed to the theme of leadership development. For Toni, the first time she contemplated the leadership role of the library media specialist was when she reviewed the application for Georgia Library Media Specialist of the Year:

> When I…started looking at the application and was really looking at it…[I thought] 'Well, we really are leaders, and we really do a lot on a daily basis that does show our leadership, and I think it's important.' But no… I hadn't really thought about it before then.

Prior to reviewing the application, Toni had mostly thought about the difference between administrators and library media specialists and how sometimes colleagues mistook her for an administrator. "Occasionally…somebody will say…'Aren't you an admin?' 'No, no, we're [library] media.' But…to really sit and think about leadership was definitely when I did that application." Toni had doubts about her leadership as she was working on the application:

> There were some things that I was like, "I don't know, is this leadership?" And then I thought, yes, that is part of leadership…Opening up first thing in the morning and staying late…those are things that prove the leader. That's not just something I do because I didn't get my work done.

After completing the award application, Toni realized that her teachers "do see [me] as a leader, and I think that's important to remember and to always keep those leadership skills up."

After winning the award, Toni stated that she started looking at her work through a leadership lens. "I think since the award, I definitely focus more on the leadership aspect of it…I feel like once I got the award I thought, 'Ok, well I need to step it up a

115

little bit.'" Toni leads a school committee focused on public relations and works as a liaison between a professional organization and the library media specialists in her area. She commented on her leadership growth since winning her award: "I've now realized that I think I've got more to offer than what I thought previously. And so, I feel like I'm more confident to voice my opinions and question things and talk to people about things." Toni reflected that the award application process changed her perspective and professional growth. "When I had to fill out those leadership questions and realized that this is a leadership position that really helped a lot. I think I've definitely evolved more as a leader."

Professional learning is important to Toni for developing leadership skills. She stated that professional learning about leadership helps library media specialists understand leadership in the role and should remind all library media specialists "that we do have these leadership opportunities, and it's important for us…to take them…Nobody comes to us and asks us…So, I think that it's very important that we take them ourselves." Toni said that she has goals to grow in her leadership skills by presenting more at library media conferences and other professional learning opportunities. She stated that she is starting to realize that she has ideas and best practices worthy of sharing. "There's things that I could share that people are interested in, and you just kind of forget that people may be interested in them." She also commented that ideas do not always have to be exceptional or innovative: "And even if you do what everybody else does, they still want to sit in your session and listen to you tell them what you do so they can say, 'Hey, I do that too.'"

The leadership theme of influence was a topic Toni discussed as well. Toni stated that her teachers and administrators come to her with all kinds of issues because they see her as a problem-solver:

> I think it's kind of leading-by-example thing where they see that I'm involved in things and that I am willing to help…. since we help [teachers and administrators] with problems I think they see us as part of the leadership team.

As her school navigated through Covid-19 challenges, Toni spoke about her role providing resources and guidance:

> I think so many teachers just didn't know where to turn…They turned to me like, 'Ok, how do we do this? How do we continue with our students?' So, I think that that was probably a very big time that I was seen as a leader…They turned to me, and I was able to help them.

Toni commented on the unique role of the library media specialist within the spectrum of administrators and teachers. "I do feel like the media specialist is in between admin and teachers in a lot of ways, kind of like a lead teacher…we definitely serve as a lead teacher, and…the teachers trust us." Toni stated that the unique role she has as a library media specialist ultimately benefits school culture. "And when we know what their [teachers'] needs are we can advocate for those teachers to the administrators, and the administrators listen to us too. So, I think it's kind of a nice in-between."

Harper. Harper contributed to the theme of leadership development. Leadership has always been a focus for Harper; she stated that it was emphasized in her master's program while studying to be a library media specialist. By viewing library media specialist work through a leadership lens, Harper said, "You really start focusing on how

117

you can impact either a grade level or the department. So, leadership is always, always in the forefront of what I want to do. And I never thought that I would want to be in a leadership role."

Additionally, Harper discussed instructional partnerships as an avenue for her leadership skills:

So, for me, leading means showing people what's out there, and I'm willing to go to those conferences. I happen to love going to GaETC and going 'Oh my God, you can do that. Look at that new feature in Flipgrid. Look at this. Look at that. This is fantastic!

Harper also spoke about knowing the right way to share that information with the teachers and administrators at her school:

And so, for me, it's me learning stuff, but disseminating that information, too. I can't hold that information in…My job is to learn things but not just keep it to myself. I've got to disseminate that. And you've got to disseminate it to the right people.

Harper noted that listening is also an important aspect of her leadership: "A lot of leadership to me is more about listening so you know what your teachers need. So, you're constantly listening, waiting for that right time and piece of information to disseminate to them."

Harper is involved with leadership roles in her school district. She spoke about her involvement in the redesign of her library media center, and how her director at the district office asked her to participate in the redesign committee for the district. The

committee toured library media centers in nearby districts to spark inspiration and get ideas. Her director has also tapped Harper to lead in other capacities:

As a leader I want to share everything…I've done that in small groups with my other middle school media specialists. [The director] allowed me to share what I learned in my specialist degree with the whole group. So, I did elementary, and I did middle and high school, and it's just been good.

Within the theme of leadership development, Harper also spoke about barriers. Harper served on her school's leadership team for many years, but that changed when a new principal came in:

I walked into…the first leadership team meeting. And he goes, 'I don't have you on the list,' and I said, 'Well, I'm the only one in my department, and it's department heads that are on leadership.' And he goes, 'Well, I don't need you in here. Goodbye.'

After his first year as principal, Harper stated that the number of staff members serving on the leadership team waned considerably. Though he was recruiting new members, Harper said she was turned down. I said, 'I would love to be on leadership,' and he's like, 'No.' He has never given me a reason, and he has never let me back on there." However, Harper has found ways to be a part of the leadership team discussion.

They have some of the leadership team meetings in the library, so I tend to walk in on some of them, and I walked in on the one where they were having the discussion about the media center and how the passes weren't working. He was about to dismiss them, and I said, 'I'm sorry, you can't dismiss them right now. Would you mind? Let's open up this discussion. I'm here. They're here. Let's talk

119

about this. Because if they're having issues and I'm the issue, I need to know this and I need to correct it.' So that's how we corrected it.

Harper discussed how the intersection of her personality and her expertise affects her leadership skills. "I'm a little more outspoken, I suppose, than I need to be. Sometimes that directly affects me. If y'all aren't happy with the way things are running, you might…talk to me and let me help you change things."

Harper also contributed to the leadership theme of influence. Due to the changing nature of the role of the school library media specialist, Harper stated, "It's hard for people to know what our job is. And so, for them to consider you a leader, you really have to do whole school stuff for them to even notice you." Harper discussed her involvement with school events along with her library media clerk:

I've usually got my hands in anything that has to do with a school-wide activity. Whether it's, you know, [a student support program]...whether it's book fairs…or when somebody needs decorations for stuff, they're always like, 'You two in the Media Center'…You know when people are down and at times when they really need it, we lift their spirits.

Harper noted that leading school-wide events or initiatives, even when not technically the task of a library media specialist, helps others get to know her and jumpstart collaboration opportunities.

Beverly. Beverly contributed to the leadership theme of influence. Beverly has been a member of the district leadership team of library media specialists, has served as a mentor for new library media specialists, leads her local library media committee, and is a member of her school's leadership team. When in school leadership meetings, she

stated that she gives input from her unique position as the library media specialist, such as sharing technology expertise or collaboration strategies:

> Often before I go into the leadership meeting, I'd come up with a list…we share what's going on in each department. So, I'd have a whole list of the things we are doing in the media center. It was an advocacy piece for me, to have a captive audience with my principal, my administrators, and everybody in the departments. Here's what I'm doing with language arts. Let me know if you want me to come speak to your department about research. So, promoting as well as explaining how I can support their department, so they can now see me as someone they can bring in for department meetings.

Beverly spoke about how she participates in department meetings as well, sometimes by presenting difficult information: "I have to talk about stuff like our materials policy, talk about things that are not necessarily fun. That's part of leadership…and being able to communicate that in a way where the teachers understand that it's important."

Beverly also plays to her strengths as a way of affecting school-wide culture and building relationships. "I would say before Covid, I really felt like I had a pulse on our school and the culture of our school and how teachers were feeling. I loved coming up with ideas of trying to boost the morale." Beverly commented that her administrators were grateful for her influence. "My previous principals would rely on me for that, 'Ok, what's something fun we can do? We gotta get people amped up. So that was the way that I led."

121

Beverly also contributed to the theme of leadership development. Beverly spoke about lessons she has learned in leadership and the need to strike the right balance with relationships and workload:

> I think that when people see you as a leader, they can count on you for things. They'll be more likely to collaborate with you…as long as you don't like, play too heavily on the admin side. If they see you being too chummy with admin, then all of a sudden, they might think you're a secret informant. So, you do kind of have to play both sides. We're kind of in between the admin and the teachers.

Another challenge for Beverly was to learn how to help others without putting in so many extra hours:

> Rather than saying the word no, instead, like 'Here's some ideas.' I'm still working on that so [the workload] doesn't become overwhelming. I would say yes because I wanted to be so helpful. If an admin needed something…then I would use my library science students to help me take it on.

Beverly said that being extra helpful would sometimes turn into assisting with projects that fell far outside the role of a library media program. "All of a sudden I became too deep in a project, and I couldn't get out."

In addition to developing her own leadership skills, building leadership capacity in students is important to Beverly. She spoke about how she works with her students:

> I try to empower the students as much as I can. If I'm teaching a class, I'll have one with me to help navigate the students. With [reading club] and other different clubs…I try to…give them the skills they need or help guide them and coach them…with library science students, too. I even try to get [library science

students] to do some of the media specialist stuff, like…if a student needs help with getting the wifi or finding something specific on the website, rather than me jumping in, I try to foster that leadership with the students as well.

Beverly noted that she is able to offer leadership experiences to students that might not otherwise have an opportunity to lead in the school environment.

Along with her leadership roles within the school building, Beverly serves on committees with library media colleagues. She presents and shares her ideas often during professional learning sessions and helps plan large-scale events. Beverly noted that this type of leadership can feel disjointed. "Developing a lesson to present at [professional learning events] to your other colleagues…going to the county office for the meetings that we have for leadership or mentoring…but [school staff] just see that I'm not here that day." Beverly reflected that not all components of leadership as a library media specialist are easy for others to see: "They don't know all the committees that I'm on and how [district leadership teams and events] work. Those sorts of meetings are not visible."

Beverly said that she has had several leadership mentors in her time as a teacher and library media specialist. Leadership instruction, however, has only been tangential to other areas of focus for Beverly through book studies with committees that were focused on a task:

A little professional development here and there, but I don't think [leadership instruction] was really explicit. It was more like…read a chapter, let's talk about it, and then move on to what we need to get done. I would say I've had very little direct instruction.

Beverly also stated that her graduate program did not have a focus on leadership skills. "I don't think there were any classes that focused on [leadership]. That would have been more useful than the cataloging class that they made me take that gave me a lot of stress."

Beverly reflected that leadership is complicated in the role of library media specialist:

> There are days where I don't feel very much like a leader, and I think that's ok because there's so many facets of the job. It's a big picture. When I look at the big picture of what I do and reflect on my year…some days I'm gonna be processing new books. And that's just because we're backed up and that's just part of it. So, I'm not beating myself up because every day is not perfect…But overall, when looking at the big picture, you see your leadership.

Continuing Education

Continuing education was a topic discussed by all participants. The types of continuing education participants spoke about included professional reading and researching to stay current, learning from colleagues, attending conferences, and pursuing graduate degrees. All participants expressed that they are driven to be life-long learners and that being a library media specialist and leader requires consistent learning and professional growth. The results that follow are organized by participant to reflect their learning journey.

Jane. Jane attends library media and technology conferences to continue her learning. Jane mentioned that she has found book studies with library media specialist colleagues to be very meaningful in her growth as a professional. She also talked about informally learning from the teachers and administrators in her building:

124

I think there's always something you can learn from other people that you work

with…there's something you admire about how someone does something. Then

you've got a mentor…That's somebody that you can learn from and then take that

piece and take that nugget and apply it to what you're doing. I don't think we ever

get too old or too experienced to learn from other people.

Additionally, Jane spoke of the benefits of strong county-level support for library media specialists and reflected on her time as a part of a county-wide library media specialist leadership team:

They were all very driven…and wanted to improve what we were doing…and

create some great opportunities to learn and grow. And that kind of put a hunger

in me…being part of that, I was like, "This is cool. I'm learning as much as I can

get. This is making me so much better at my job. Now, even though I'm not part

of that team, I still want to continue growing and improving.

Grace. Unlike the other participants, Grace did not have a teaching background prior to becoming a library media specialist. She spoke about observing and working with the teachers in her building to learn more about classroom management:

I would not say that I'm the disciplinarian or the mean librarian. That is not me.

So, sometimes I wish I was. I had a teacher in here the other day, and she had 60

kids. She was teaching two classes at the same time, and you could hear a pin

drop. Because she's got them under control.

Grace also attends conferences to learn about best practices and new technologies, as well as to connect with other library media specialists. She is also pursuing a doctoral degree in education.

Louisa. Louisa has pursued advanced studies through graduate school and has received her doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction. She also likes to attend conferences when she can in order to learn from colleagues and connect with other library media specialists. Remembering one session in particular, Louisa stated that the presenter changed her perspective about instructional collaboration because she showed "that collaboration isn't only co-teaching...and that it's not a cycle but a spectrum." Louisa mentioned that she learns from the community organizations she volunteers with outside of K-12 education as well, stating that they provide a different perspective on organization and leadership.

Toni. Toni stated she is "always trying to keep on top of things…always trying to keep up with what's current. So, I guess that's practicing my own research skills, too, in a way." Toni mentioned that she also seeks out information that helps her connect with her students:

> I was listening to a podcast in the morning at the gym…she was like in her 20s…she was talking on the podcast about how she does all her research on Tik Tok. And at first, I was like, 'Ooh, Tik Tok…I can't even believe it.' And then I started thinking about it, and I thought, 'No…this is where the students are…even though they may not formally call it research, but that's where they're getting their ideas. And that's where they're getting their research.'

Additionally, Toni also spoke about the benefits of meeting with other library media specialists in her own district, as well as Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) meetings, and state conferences. She uses email groups and social media for professional learning, as well as mentors within her own school. "Our admin - I take a lot

126

of cues from them. I've got an assistant principal that I really work a lot with…and she's just very, very helpful."

Harper. Harper stated that her graduate degree programs were very meaningful and taught her about being a library media specialist who teaches and leads. She spoke about experiences she had while earning her specialist's degree. One assignment was to look at libraries and makerspaces outside of the school environment, such as public libraries and community makerspaces:

> I was very impressed with all of the different things that they had, whether it was geared towards students or adults. And I thought, ok, if that's what they're going to see outside, we kind of need to bring that inside and show kids that it's not just the place for books, you know, that it's a place for learning, but also for making and doing.

Harper also spoke about the need for continuing education due to the nature of the job of library media specialist itself.

> First, I had to go to school to learn the job and that was the master's degree end of it. And then…you master the job, supposedly, and then it changes on you constantly. So, then you're like, 'Ok, well, this is not what I expected.' But then…you go back to school again and you learn.

Now that she has graduated, Harper continues her learning by researching professional trends, connecting with library media specialist colleagues, and attending conferences. "I love to learn new things when they're obviously useful to me or someone else."

Beverly. One of Beverly's favorite things to learn about is new technology tools. She discovers these through her own research or from colleagues sharing ideas. Beverly

also notes that visiting other library media centers and library media specialists can be powerful learning experiences. Additionally, mentors have played a large role in Beverly's continued learning, stating that one of her colleagues had a significant impact on her:

> [She] was a big mentor for me when it came to learning how to deal with adults because I was….coming from the classroom dealing with students and then having to realize, ok, adults aren't that different. You know, they're gonna sometimes give you attitude and how to navigate that. She…modeled leading with grace and when there is a problem…approaching it head on rather than just letting it kind of fester…Because she's had so much experience, I was able to learn a lot from her."

Of another colleague, Beverly said, "She was always…my mentor for teaching students and different strategies that work…just being able to watch her and grow as a teacher through being in proximity with her for so long and bounce ideas off of her."

Conclusion

Qualitative data was collected for this study in order to uncover how award-winning library media specialists perceive themselves as leaders, reveal how they enact leadership in their role, and bridge the gap between leadership standards and the lived professional experiences of library media specialists as school leaders. Six Georgia library media specialists participated in this narrative inquiry study. The themes that emerged from the data included relationships, communication, dispositions, leadership, and continuing education.

Chapter VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover how award-winning library media specialists perceive themselves as leaders, uncover how they enact leadership in their role, and bridge the gap between leadership standards and the lived professional experiences of library media specialists as school leaders. The conceptual framework for this study was anchored in the meta-ethnographic work of Everhart and Johnston (2016), in which they created a proposed theory of school librarian leadership. Through narrative inquiry, my goal was to acquire and understand the leadership experiences of award-winning library media specialists. The results of this study provide valuable insight into the experiences of library media specialists and their leadership skills, perceptions, and growth.

Research Questions

The research questions were designed to obtain information about the leadership experiences of library media specialists through qualitative interviews. The three main research questions were as follows:

1. How do award-winning school library media specialists define their leadership role?

2. How do award-winning school library media specialists perceive they demonstrate leadership?

129

3. How do award-winning school library media specialists build their capacity as leaders?

Interpretation of Findings

The findings from participant interviews were distilled into five themes in the previous chapter. The research questions are answered in this section based on the findings. Connections between these findings and the literature reviewed for this study are noted as well.

Research Question 1: How do award-winning school library media specialists define their leadership role?

When asked about how she describes leadership as a school library media specialist, Jane paused and said, "Ooh. Not really sure how to define it…because there's a lot of different ways you go about leading." All participants agreed that leadership as a library media specialist is multifaceted, variable, and different from typical expectations of leadership in schools.

Transformational Leadership. All participants defined their leadership in the context of changes they had made in the library media program. Participants described taking the lead in physical transformations of the library media space, such as new areas like makerspaces, or new configurations of furniture better suited to student use. In addition to changes in the physical space, participants also described transforming the climate in the library media center, making it a welcoming space where students and staff can come to ask questions, learn, create, and collaborate. The changes the participants described align with transformational leadership as defined by Smith (2014) in which transformational leaders are agents of change in their organizations.

130

Additionally, Smith (2014) stated that transformational leaders are focused on the greater good of an organization or program; the findings of this study align with this aspect of Smith's (2014) description as participants spoke about wanting to make their library media centers a place where students are engaged and learning. Participants also defined their leadership through changes they have made in library programming, such as increased instructional collaboration and contemporary ideas that appeal to students. Participants described their library media program updates in the context of increasing the engagement of students and staff in order to advance learning.

School Culture. Zmuda and Harada (2008) stated that the culture of a school often has a direct bearing on the leadership growth and impact of a school library media specialist. Participants discussed the process of reflecting on their work as library media specialists in order to understand and define the impact their leadership has on school culture. Leithwood and Sun (2012), in their studies of transformational leadership in school environments, have shown that this type of leadership is successful in managing change in schools by having a direct positive effect on teacher behaviors, student achievement, and school culture. All participants noted that they saw positive shifts in the way students and teachers used technology; these shifts were attributed to the library media specialists' technology leadership enacted through teaching and coaching, as well as exposing students and staff to new technologies. Additionally, participants defined themselves as literacy leaders by noting positive changes in reading culture school-wide based on how they engaged students and staff in reading through promotions, competitions, and events. These effects on school culture align with how Leithwood and Sun (2012) define the positive impact transformational leadership can have in schools.

131

Additionally, according to Haycock (2017), school leadership teams that embrace transformational leadership as their own practice can be particularly effective for school library media specialists and their collaborative programs. This type of leadership is evident in the experiences of the participants in this study. Participants described the positive impact of working with transformational leaders at their local school or at the school district office, aligning with this statement from Haycock (2017): "For many teacher librarians, the most prized is transformational leadership, where they are working with administrators to develop a climate for change and a culture based on collaboration and mutual respect," (p. 1).

While not all participants currently had administrative teams that embraced transformational leadership practices at the time of the interviews, all had worked with administrative teams that were open to transformational practices at some point in their careers noting the positive impact that environment had on their leadership work. One participant stated that one of her principals was more authoritarian than transformational as he was opposed to some aspects of her leadership; this type of leadership hindered what she was able to do as a collaborative leader. Both Johnston (2012) and Lewis (2020) stated that administrators who operate in a top-down approach, are resistant to change, or resist shared leadership create school cultures that challenge the instructional leadership role of the library media specialist.

Leadership Mindset. Participants had differences in the development of their leadership mindset, a behavioral concept included in Everhart and Johnston's (2016) proposed theory of school librarian leadership. Three participants were advanced in their leadership mindset, as they had viewed their work as a library media specialist through

the lens of leadership for an extended period of time. Two participants were less secure in their leadership mindset noting doubts about some aspects of leadership work. One participant viewed her leadership mindset as new because she had only recently considered the leadership role of the library media specialist when completing her award application. These differences can be associated with exposure to the concept of library media specialists as leaders.

The three participants who were advanced in their leadership mindset had exposure to the concept through state and national conferences, book studies, American Libraries Association (ALA) standards, as well as the Georgia School Librarian Evaluation Instrument (SLEI). Of these three participants, one spoke about how leadership was an emphasis in her library media graduate school program. The two participants who were less secure in their leadership as a library media specialist also had exposure to the concept, but in lesser capacities or shorter timeframes. The one participant who felt somewhat new to the concept of leading as a library media specialist had no exposure to the concept prior to her award application.

Research Question 2: How do award-winning school library media specialists perceive they demonstrate leadership?

Relationships. Everhart and Johnston (2016) stressed the importance of collaborative relationships as a key concept in the theory of school library leadership. The findings of this study align with this aspect of Everhart and Johnston's (2016) theory as all participants stated that their ability to develop positive, consistent, and collaborative relationships with teachers was one way they demonstrate leadership as library media specialists. Participants described building relationships through one-on-one interactions,

133

such as collaborating with a teacher on lessons, as well as in larger group environments, such as participating in teacher grade level or subject area meetings. One participant stated that developing and sustaining relationships with teachers is the foundation of her successful library media program, so that is what she focuses on the most. When barriers stood in the way of instructional collaboration, participants described creative approaches to working through those challenges, such as getting students hooked on a technology tool first or finding at least one innovative teacher willing to work together.

Developing relationships with students is another way all participants described demonstrating leadership, which correlates with Jones and Long's (2019) notion that library media specialists that are successful in the relational dispositions know how to maximize their educational impact and build positive relationships at the same time. Further underscoring Jones and Long's (2019) point about relational balance, participants noted that they demonstrated leadership by creating a positive reading culture for students, even when that meant they had to challenge long-established reading programs or norms. Additionally, participants stated that they wanted their library media center to be the "hub" or the "heart" of the school, and, to do that, they intentionally engaged with students in positive ways, such as being helpful, knowledgeable, and creating safe and welcoming spaces for students. This finding aligns with Jones and Long (2019) and Kimmel et al. (2012) who also found that library media specialists successfully built relationships by being helpful, communicating effectively, and creating safe and inviting spaces.

Participants all commented that they have demonstrated leadership by serving on school building leadership teams, working closely with school administration, or

134

participating on technology teams. This finding aligns with Everhart and Johnston (2016) who also noted that collaborative relationships with administration and technology teams is an integral part of school library media specialist leadership. By serving on school committees and being a visible part of school-wide initiatives, such as a laptop rollout or the adoption of new software, participants reflected that this type of leadership was evident to others in their building.

Communication. All participants agreed that effective communication with stakeholder groups is a way that leadership as a library media specialist is demonstrated. Participants discussed using websites and social media to connect with students, parents, and the larger community. The learning management platform or messaging service provided by the school is used by participants to communicate with students and/or parents. Within the school building, participants discussed using the closed-circuit system, scrolling and/or school news to communicate with everyone in the school building. Using these tools effectively is a way that library media specialists described how they make their leadership visible.

Everhart and Johnston (2016) identified effective communication as a critical component in their theory of library media specialist leadership. Participants all discussed adapting different communication styles based on personalities and needs. The ability to understand the nuances of communication strategies is another way participants demonstrated leadership as effective communicators and correlates with Weisburg's (2017) discussion of the emotional intelligence necessary in successful school library media specialist leadership. Three participants stated that quick face-to-face conversations are the most effective way to communicate with their principals after

135

learning that other communication styles were not as productive. All participants discussed the benefits of participating in team meetings with teachers as a way to communicate effectively about instructional collaboration opportunities as well as demonstrate instructional leadership. All participants also stated that individual conversations with teachers work well when trying to get them to try something new or stretch their teaching habits. These findings also align with Jones and Long's (2019) exploration of the relational disposition in which library media specialists communicate effectively by using thoughtful and detailed communication strategies.

Participants agreed that very few people truly understand the full scope of the work of a school library media specialist. This misconception was highlighted by Weisburg (2017) as a large part of the reason why job cuts hit school library media specialists particularly hard after the economic downturn in 2008. As a result, part of the demonstrated leadership that participants discussed included advocacy, both in communicating the scope of work of a library media specialist to the people in their school buildings and to outside stakeholders as well, such as parents, community members, and legislators. This finding aligns with Weisburg's (2017) assertion that library media specialists must advocate for their profession by developing leadership expertise, staying visible and vital, and knowing how to handle important communications with a variety of stakeholders.

Vision. Kimmel et al. (2012) identified that library media specialists must be proactive, have a vision for the library media program, and be willing to change and adapt the vision as new needs develop. All participants in this study aligned with

Kimmel's assertions because they described demonstrating leadership through being proactive, creating a vision for their program, and being agents of change.

All participants discussed their vision for their library media program and included that as part of their demonstrated leadership. Four participants stated that their vision was more informal than formal, but clearly visible to others in the physical design of their library media center, as well as the programming they create. Two participants discussed that they created more formal vision statements in addition to the physical design and library programming. According to Kimmel et al. (2012) "if you don't have a vision, you don't know what to change," (p. 116). Along with adapting the vision based on school needs, curriculum changes, and technology updates, all participants spoke about the changes needed during Covid-related school closures; this ability to visualize the big picture and change the vision appropriately is what Kimmel et al. (2012) described as library media specialists moving from facilitative to flexible in their leadership.

Encouraging others to believe in the library media program vision was also discussed by participants. This ability to communicate and engage others in a vision aligns with Kouzes and Posner (2017) who stated that inspiring a shared vision is a tenet of exemplary leadership. All participants spoke about using the positive relationships they have built, as well as effective communication strategies, to garner support for the library media program vision from students, teachers, and administrators. Additionally, participants described what Kouzes and Posner (2017) referred to as "appealing to common ideals," (p. 119) by connecting with stakeholders through common goals, such as content mastery, literacy skills, and learning engagement.

137

Change management and challenging the status quo were leadership topics discussed by all participants. In the following examples of change, innovation, and challenging established norms, participants aligned with another of Kouzes and Posner's (2017) tenets of exemplary leadership: challenge the process. Sometimes new school-wide initiatives are given to the library media specialist to manage, such as a one-to-one laptop rollout for students. This type of assigned task was discussed by one participant as a major change to manage in many ways including how it impacted her own workload, the need to develop a workflow for troubleshooting, and a fundamental shift in instructional practices school wide. Another participant discussed leading the shift away from a reading program that limited what students could read; this type of change management included helping teachers understand the importance of choice reading and how it can improve reading scores. Yet another participant described the development of her makerspace despite doubts expressed by staff members. As a part of challenging the process, Kouzes and Posner (2017) stated that exemplary leaders "exercise outsight" (p. 158) by looking beyond their own experiences and including diverse perspectives. Participants spoke about their learning processes in order to advance their library media programs and manage challenges such as the ones discussed above. The learning required by participants to develop and implement a vision is discussed in research question three.

Research Question 3: How do award-winning school library media specialists build their capacity as leaders?

To become a certified school library media specialist in the state of Georgia, a master's degree is required, so all participants completed graduate studies. One participant has completed a doctoral degree, and one is currently pursuing a doctoral degree. However, only one participant stated that her graduate studies emphasized the role of the library media specialist as a leader and taught skills accordingly.

Participants agreed that continually learning is a part of the job of a library media specialist. This is echoed in Everhart and Johnston's (2016) proposed theory of school librarian leadership in which professional growth is an important concept that represents the development of a library media specialist as a leader, as well as a positive change agent. Everhart and Johnston (2016) further develop the concept of professional growth as occurring "via formalized processes, personal exploration, and dedication," (p. 16). All participants were dedicated to professional growth and pursued learning consistently and in a variety of ways. Beyond graduate studies, the types of learning described by participants fall into two main categories: individual learning and peer learning.

Individual Learning. All participants described the benefits of regularly receiving direct instruction at national, state, and local conferences designed for library media specialists or technology experts. Participants also stated they listened to professional podcasts, read professional books, and followed professionally related social media to continue their learning and stay current. All participants discussed using the internet almost daily to research new ideas, technologies, lessons, and engagement strategies. The individual learning experiences described by participants correlates with

views from Johnston (2012) and Kimmel et al. (2012) that indicate informal learning, self-education, and initiative were important for professional growth in school library media specialist leadership development.

Peer Learning. Learning with others was described as extremely beneficial by all participants. This finding aligns with Everhart and Johnston's (2016) notion that "school librarian leadership develops more comfortably and successfully with peers" (p. 17). Learning with peers sometimes overlaps with individual learning such as meeting up with other library media specialists at a conference or talking about a professional book in a book study group. Locally, getting together with library media specialist colleagues and sharing ideas was a learning method championed by all participants. These types of learning were described by participants as happening both formally, such as during local professional learning opportunities, and informally, such as meeting up at a restaurant. Two participants stated that serving on library media leadership teams inspired them to continue to grow as a library media specialist and leader.

Mentors were also highlighted as very valuable in the continuing education process. Participants stated that mentors can be formally assigned by administrators but are often informally adopted by library media specialists as well, which aligns with Everhart and Johnston's (2016) finding that library media specialists benefit from mentors who are also library media specialists, as well as educators with a variety of backgrounds. Mentors described by participants included other library media specialists, teachers, technology specialists, school administrators, district leaders, and community leaders.

Implications for Practice

Understanding the nuanced, yet significant ways that library media specialists operate as leaders within their school environments can assist other library media specialists in their leadership growth. Additionally, this understanding can help stakeholders become more knowledgeable about the complex role of the school library media specialist. The findings from this study have been refined into six specific implications for practice.

Graduate School Programs

One of the notable findings in this study is that only one of the six participants could recall studying leadership in their graduate school programs to become a library media specialist. Graduate programs for library media specialists should include significant study of general leadership skills as well as leadership skills specifically related to the role of library media specialist. Everhart and Johnston (2016) echo this sentiment: "School librarian preparation programs can create confident school librarians who have…the leadership skills to enact the expected leadership role in their school," (p. 22). Reading through a collection of unique and personal library media leadership experiences, stories, and reflections, such as the ones presented in this study, can capture the essence of library media leadership and motivate graduate students to engage with curriculum designed to build leadership skills.

Professional Learning

As Everhart and Johnston (2016) stated, "However, it is not only initial school library preparation education programs that contribute to this confidence and leadership growth," (p. 22). Professional learning topics could include relationship skills,

141

communication skills, and leadership dispositions, all of which emerged as themes in this study. Additionally, the leadership role of the library media specialist should be a topic of ongoing professional learning (Everhart and Johnston, 2016; Kimmel et al., 2012). Library media specialist participants in this study described themselves as highly motivated learners by nature of the ever-changing profession, and the learner disposition was evident in all participants in this study. State and national conferences that include library media specialists as a target audience should seek out more presenters that speak about library media specialists' leadership stories and how to build leadership skills. In Georgia, where this study was conducted, more school districts could adopt the School Librarian Evaluation Instrument (SLEI), which includes instructional leadership as one of its ten standards; professional learning organizations could use the SLEI description of instructional leadership as a foundation for developing professional learning courses for library media specialists.

The participants in this study spoke enthusiastically about how much they benefited from spending time discussing ideas and learning from their peers. This finding is noteworthy for school districts and organizations that support schools; it shows the need for library media specialists to have professional learning time to learn from each other, made complicated by the fact that two library media specialists rarely work in the same building. Everhart and Johnston (2016) echoed this sentiment, stating that "school librarianship is a unique and solitary position," (p. 23) and that professional learning opportunities with peer interaction aid in leadership development.

Additionally, mentors were a source of significant and continual learning for the library media specialists in the study. Mentors can be an effective source of professional

growth for library media specialists (Deissler et al., 2015; Everhart & Johnston, 2016; Weisburg, 2017). Mentoring could be another form of professional learning supported by local school administration, school districts, and school library media support organizations by connecting mentees and mentors, as well as providing time to observe and learn from each other.

Lastly, information about the complex role of the library media specialist, including the ways they operate as leaders, should be included in professional learning for other educator roles including teachers, technology specialists, and school administrators. By having a broader understanding of the work of library media specialists, stakeholders are empowered, and there is increased opportunity for instructional collaboration, which strengthens library media programs (Weisburg, 2017). Studies have shown that strong library media programs lead to increased student achievement and graduation rates (Lance & Kachel, 2018).

Communication

All participants agreed that their strong communication skills helped them succeed as library media specialist leaders and were especially important in building relationships. Everhart and Johnston (2016) also found that communication was one of the three concepts at the core of school library media specialist leadership overlapping with relationships and confidence. Findings in this study highlight the nuances of communication for library media specialists including how to navigate different communication strategies for a wide variety of audiences and personalities. The need for communication skills has implications for graduate programs and professional learning,

143

which could include direct instruction about effective communication strategies specifically for the role of library media specialist.

Advocacy

All participants in this study agreed that the role of the school library media specialist is often underestimated and misunderstood. There is a clear need for clarity and understanding about the role of the school library media specialist, especially the leadership aspect (Weisburg, 2017). In addition to the professional learning mentioned above, organizations that support school library media specialists should work collaboratively to better define the role of the library media specialist. Organizations could then launch campaigns designed to better educate others about the ways library media specialists serve their schools, including in a leadership capacity. Increased understanding about the role of the library media specialist could prevent further cuts of library media specialist positions and library media program budgets and potentially lead to increases in the number of school library media specialist positions and library media support positions.

Transformational Leadership

Bass and Riggio (2006) stated that leaders show transformational leadership in their regular interactions with employees through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Participants in this study described their library media work as transformational in nature by positively influencing others, inspiring creativity, working individually with colleagues and students, and providing library media programming designed to spark intellectual pursuits. However, participants in this study were reluctant to identify with a specific

leadership style such as transformational leadership. There is an opportunity for graduate studies and professional learning to educate library media specialists on different leadership styles and help library media specialists identify the type of leadership needed for their library media program to be successful.

Theory

Everhart and Johnston's (2016) proposed theory of school librarian leadership was used as the conceptual framework for this study. The core concepts of relationships, confidence, and communication in Everhart and Johnston's (2016) theory emerged as themes in this study as well. Furthermore, the participants in this study discussed additional concepts that Everhart and Johnston (2016) proposed in their theory, including leadership engagement, leadership skill set, leadership development with peers, leadership mindset, education, school culture, and growth. Resistance, a concept described in Everhart and Johnston's (2016) theory as reluctance on the part of the library media specialist to lead, was not evident in this study, likely due to the selection criteria for participants. Evidence from this study can be used to support further development of the theory of school librarian leadership.

Policy

The data and student achievement focus of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) ultimately led to a softening of funding mandates, and educational leaders in many states moved staffing allocations away from library media specialists to positions like literacy coaches or academic coaches (Bromley, 2011; Lance, 2018; Peterson, 2014). Educational policymakers should consider the findings of this study when updating policies and recommendations regarding staffing. Locally, educational leaders should

145

develop policies that incorporate library media staffing and budgets to support library media programming.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that only library media specialists were included as participants. Perspectives from students, teachers, and school administrators were not considered in this study. Information from these stakeholder groups could provide valuable insight into how others view the leadership role of the library media specialist. Furthermore, all participants were female, award-winners, and working as library media specialists in the state of Georgia, representing additional limitations of this study. Perspectives from library media specialists who are male, who have not won awards, or who work in other states may provide different perspectives about library media specialist leadership.

The library media specialists in this study represented all school levels equally, with two from elementary school, two from middle school, and two from high school. This heterogeneous grouping is a possible limitation of this study. A more homogenous group, such as library media specialists all from one school level, could provide more details about leadership at that level.

Recommendations for Future Research

Participants in this study were limited to award-winning library media specialists who had already considered their work through the lens of leadership. Future researchers could consider studying the perspectives of library media specialists who have not explored leadership opportunities in their role to help define leadership barriers and identify further implications for leadership practices. Future researchers could also

146

consider studying specifically how library media specialists learn leadership skills; one avenue of study could be to narrow participants to library media specialists who have earned graduate degrees in the last five years to investigate if graduate school programs for library media specialists now include more coursework on leadership. Future researchers could also compare the leadership skills of more experienced library media specialists with less experienced library media specialists to investigate if leadership skills are developed through experience or can be taught.

Another recommendation for future researchers is to broaden the geographic location of participants to gain a wider view of library media practices in different areas of the United States. Additionally, because all participants in this study were female and award-winners, another recommendation for future researchers would be to include male library media specialists and non-award winners in future studies to incorporate additional perspectives.

Lastly, future researchers could explore a more homogeneous grouping of library media specialists. For example, a group of elementary library media specialists could provide insight into how fixed schedules impact their leadership skills and opportunities.

Conclusions

From 1999-2016, more than 10,000 school library media specialist positions were cut, representing almost 20% of the profession (Lance, 2018). As Weisburg (2017) stated, "Librarians must learn how to lead in order for their programs to succeed and thrive" (p. xv). The focus of this research was to explore how award-winning library media specialists in Georgia perceive themselves as leaders, reveal how they act as leaders in

their role, and bridge the gap between calls to lead and the lived professional experiences of library media specialists as school leaders.

In this study, participants relayed their experiences and ideas as library media specialists, revealing leadership dispositions, skills, and doubts. Through interviews, all participants revealed that they are impactful members of their school staff as library media specialists and lead through the complex work they do in schools. This research has allowed me to tell the story of the leadership lives of library media specialists, and these findings can provide the field of school library media, as well as K-12 education in general, with better ways to support library media specialists. Additionally, the findings from this study can also provide graduate school programs in school library media with leadership examples and information about the need to include leadership skills as a part of their curriculum.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Protocol Exemption Report

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
For the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04267-2022   **Responsible Researcher(s):** Holly Frilot

Supervising Faculty: Dr. D. Laverne Hill

Project Title: *Leading from the Middle: A Narrative Analysis of Award-Winning School Library Media Specialists in Georgia.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations **category 2**. If the nature of the research changes such that exemption criteria no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research study.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Upon completion of the research study collected data must be securely maintained (locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher(s) for a minimum of 3 years. At the end of the required time, collected data must be permanently destroyed.*
- *Pseudonym lists must be kept in a separate, secure file from corresponding name lists, email addresses, etc.*
- *Under exempt guidelines recording interviews is permitted provided the recordings are used to create an accurate transcript. All recordings must be deleted immediately from files and recording devices. Exempt guidelines prohibit the collection, storage, or sharing of recordings.*
- *The informed consent statement must be read aloud to participants at the start of the focus-group session. The researcher's reading of the informed consent statement must be included in the final transcript.*

☒ *If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.*

Elizabeth Ann Olphie   03.02.2022   *Thank you for submitting an IRB application.*
Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator   *Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-253-2947.*

Revised: 06.02.16

APPENDIX B

Potential Participant Email Request

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Dear Georgia Award-Winning Library Media Specialist:

Congratulations on your accomplishments as a library media specialist! I am a doctoral student at Valdosta State University researching library media specialists as leaders, and I am seeking participants for my qualitative study. Thank you for considering this request.

Participants who qualify for this study have won Georgia Library Media Specialist of the Year and/or Exemplary Library Media Program in the years 2017-2021. These years are chosen because of the award's updated emphasis on leadership skills. Qualified participants must also still be a full-time library media specialist in Georgia.

The research study will include three interviews that last about an hour and a half each. These interviews will be conducted in a private location, such as a conference room or home office, either in-person or online. Pseudonyms will be used in place of names and school districts. If you have questions about the study, please email me at hmfrilot@valdosta.edu. If you are interested in possibly participating in this study, please fill out this form within 10 days: *(link to questionnaire)*

I will review responses and reach out to let you know whether or not you have been chosen for this study. Thank you for your time and commitment to the library media specialist profession!

Sincerely,

Holly Frilot

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to

Holly Frilot *at **hmfrilot@valdosta.edu**. This study has been approved by the Valdosta*

State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research

Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible

for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or

questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB

Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

APPENDIX C

Participant Eligibility Questionnaire

1. What is your name?

2. What is your email address?

3. Did you receive the Georgia Library Media Specialist of the Year Award in one of the years 2017-2021? If so, what year?

4. Did you receive the Georgia Exemplary / Exceptional Library Media Program Award in one of the years 2017-2021? If so, what year?

5. What level (elementary, middle, or high) school were you working in when you earned your award?

6. What Georgia school district were you in when you won your award?

7. In the year you won your award, what was the approximate number of students at your school?

8. In the year you won your award, would you describe your school setting as urban, suburban, or rural?

9. Are you working full-time as a library media specialist during the 2021-2022 school year?

10. What level (elementary, middle, or high) school are you working in during the 2021-2022 school year?

11. What school district are you working in during the 2021-2022 school year?

12. How many years have you been a library media specialist?

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to

Holly Frilot *at* ***hmfrilot@valdosta.edu****. This study has been approved by the Valdosta*

State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research

Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible

for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or

questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB

Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

APPENDIX D

Potential Participant Email Follow Up

Dear Georgia Award-Winning Library Media Specialist:

Thank you for your interest in participating in my qualitative study about library media specialists as leaders. Your participation is requested.

As a refresher, participants who qualify for this study have won Library Media Specialist of the Year at the regional or state level, and/or Exemplary Library Media Program in the years 2017-2021. These years are chosen because of the award's updated emphasis on leadership skills. Qualified participants must also still be a full-time library media specialist in Georgia.

The research study will include three interviews that last about an hour and a half each. These interviews will be conducted in a private location, such as a conference room or home office, either in-person or online. Pseudonyms will be used in place of names and schools.

Please respond with questions and/or confirmation of your participation, and thank you again for your willingness to participate. Once I hear back from you, we can work together to find mutually convenient times to conduct interviews.

Thank you,

Holly Frilot

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to **Holly Frilot** *at* **hmfrilot@valdosta.edu**. *This study has been approved by the Valdosta*

State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research

Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible

for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or

questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB

Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

APPENDIX E

Research Statement

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a research study entitled "Leading from the Middle: A Narrative Analysis of Award-Winning School Library Media Specialists in Georgia", which is being conducted by Holly Frilot, a student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of the study is to understand the leadership practices of library media specialists. You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about informed leadership practices in the field of library media education and how to address leadership education in library media education programs.

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participation should take approximately 60-90 minutes in each of 3 interviews. The interviews will be audio recorded to capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. Once the interview recording has been transcribed, the recording will be deleted from recording devices. This research study and your participation will be kept confidential. Your identifiable information will be replaced with a pseudonym in publications or presentations. No one, including the researcher, will associate your responses with your identity.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding, or to skip questions you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older.

173

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Holly Frilot at hmfrilot@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

APPENDIX F

Interview Questions

First Interview

1. Please tell me about who you are as a person outside of the library.

2. What type of K-12 student were you? Please describe your own educational experiences in K-12 and college.

3. What drew you to pursue the field of K-12 education?

4. Please describe your professional journey prior to becoming a school library media specialist.

5. Describe the various schools and environments you have worked in: levels, school size, setting, etc.

6. What drew you to the field of school library?

7. Tell me about an "a-ha" moment (or moments) when you knew that the field of education was the right fit for you.

8. Tell me about an "a-ha" moment (or moments) when you knew that the field of school library media was the right fit for you.

9. Tell me about pivotal learning experiences early in your career that helped shape who you are as a library media specialist today.

10. Describe a mentor you have had and how they have influenced who you are as a school library media specialist.

11. Describe an instructional collaborator(s) you have worked with and detail how the collaboration process went.

12. Describe the expectations of a library media specialist when you began in the role. How were things different then?

13. Describe an instructional collaborator(s) you worked with early in your career and detail how the collaboration process went.

14. Are there any other experiences during the time leading up to winning your award that you'd like to share?

Second Interview

1. Do you have any further thoughts to share based on our previous interview?

2. Please share your thoughts on what makes up a contemporary, successful library media program today.

3. What are some of your favorite library media specialist tasks? What are some of your least favorite?

4. Tell me about the aspects of your library media program that you are proud of.

5. What are your typical duties as a library media specialist? What is a typical day or week like? Please share as many details as possible.

6. What are the most difficult challenges you've faced? How did you overcome them?

7. What are your current skills as a library media specialist leader?

8. How do you define the leadership role of library media specialists?

9. How is your leadership visible to others? Tell me about times where you felt like your leadership was evident.

10. What leadership skills are less visible to others? Tell me more about your leadership that is less visible to others.

11. Please describe your technology leadership.

12. Please describe your school culture and how it has impacted you as a library media specialist.

13. How does effective communication play in your leadership? Who are your stakeholders and how do you communicate with them?

14. How do you build relationships? How do relationships impact your effectiveness as a leader?

15. Who are your go-to collaborators? Why do you think you work well together?

16. Have you ever won over someone who was initially reluctant to work with you? Tell me about that relationship.

17. What types of communication do you use? Do you use different types or styles of communication for different stakeholders? Tell me about how you promote your program and inform others.

18. What led you to apply for an award?

19. Please describe how you analyzed your leadership as a library media specialist in your award application.

Third Interview

1. Do you have any further thoughts to share based on our previous interview?

2. How has your work as a library media specialist evolved since you won this award?

3. Tell me about a time recently where you felt like a leader.

4. What does school library media leadership mean to you personally?

5. Is it important to be a leader as a library media specialist? Why?

6. What would you say to others that believe library media specialists are support personnel and should not be leaders?

7. Is it important for you to be considered a leader by others? Why?

8. What role do relationships play in your leadership growth?

9. Do you feel as though you are a leader among library media specialists / your peers? Is that important to you?

10. What role does professional learning play in your growth as a leader?

11. What role does confidence play in leadership?

12. What does it mean to be a library media specialist leader today?

13. What do you see in the future for library media specialist leadership?

14. What advice do you have for new library media specialists?

APPENDIX G

Field Notes Template

Date:	
Participant:	
Location:	
Interview Timeframe:	
Interview Topic:	
Background info (as needed):	
Setting description:	
Non-verbal observations:	

Researcher comments:	