

**University of Idaho**

---

**From the Selected Works of Rick A Stoddart**

---

January, 2011

# Competing Perspectives: Communicating the Value of School Librarians and ICT Skills to School Principals/Administrators

Rick A Stoddart, *Boise State University*



Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/richard\\_stoddart/19/](https://works.bepress.com/richard_stoddart/19/)

Title: Competing Perspectives: Communicating the Value of School Librarians and ICT Skills to School Principals/Administrators

**Introduction:**

In order to stay competitive in the 21st century school environment, LIS programs need to support stronger communication coursework for school librarians or innovate new ways to meet this important need. Research suggests that many principals and school administrators are unaware of the purpose of school library programs and receive very little or no education on the role of school librarians in their professional preparation ( "Resolving the Most Critical Problem...", 1990; Hartzell, 1997; Alexander et. al. 2003; O'Neal 2004; Levitov 2009, Levitov, 2010). A recent study in the state of Idaho has shown that principals and administrators learned about school libraries and librarians primarily through three methods: informal communication with school librarians (80.7%), on-the-job experience (81.3%), and personal experience (84.7%) (*Idaho school impact study*, 2010, p.90). Therefore, the ways in which a school librarian conveys the successes and impact of a school library program are of paramount importance. The better trained a librarian is in communication concepts such as marketing, public relations, and advocacy, the better prepared a school library is to succeed in the school. "When one realizes that the vast majority of administrators attribute what they know about libraries and librarians to direct, albeit informal, experience, the importance of ensuring that administrators are exposed as early as possible to strong library programs cannot be overstated (School Impact Study p. 90)."

One obvious way to increase exposure of strong library programs to principals would be for school librarians and administrators to meet on a regular basis. Unfortunately this same study revealed that at least 60% of school administrators do not regard a regular meeting between a principal and librarian as essential (Lance School Library Monthly p.15). As such the possible

contact between a school librarian and principal is diminished and with it the opportunity to convey the integral purpose of school libraries to their school. This is indeed disheartening as administrators are twice as likely to assess their school's Information and Communication-Technology (ICT) standards as excellent if they value regular face to face meetings with school librarians (School Library Study, p. 101). Librarians need strong communication and advocacy skills to promote strong library programs to teachers, principals, and school administrators.

Without question, school librarians are making a difference in our schools. Research continues to show the importance of school librarians to student success, literacy efforts, and the student development of ICT skills (*School libraries work!*, 2008; Chan, 2008). Further emphasizing that school libraries remain critical elements within education and learning. Librarians not only collaborate with teachers on lesson plans to great effect, but increase student test scores in many areas (*School libraries work!*, 2008). Surprisingly, this evidence alone has yet to pull significant weight with school principals and administrators. These battling perceptions as to the importance of school libraries can have significant impact upon the survival and success of the school library within a school. A local example encapsulates this point, as the Boise School District choose to “eliminate budgets for new textbooks, library books and supplies (Estrella, 2010).”, instead of protecting this critical area of school which impacts test scores and student achievement.

Obviously, the more communication a school librarian has with their administrators and principals, both formal and informal, the better placed a library is to serve the needs of the school and students, as well as assure the school library's survival. The professional literature is rife with such articles to support this sentiment (Levitov, 2010; Hartzell 2003a; Hartzell 2003b ). Yet, school librarians in the field feel ill prepared for this task. As one school librarian in Idaho

related: "I think two of the most difficult things we do is communication with principals (first) and dealing with staff/para-professionals (second). There is little-to-no training for this!"<sup>1</sup> This librarian is not alone in her assessment of the state affairs in library education and the skill of communication as another Idaho school librarian relates: "My elementary education nor library media specialist training addressed this skill. I learned on the job with ah-ha successes and missteps followed by sleepless nights."<sup>2</sup>

As research shows the critical need for communication skills for school librarians, how do LIS programs fulfill this mandate? Are they preparing future teacher-librarians for success or frustration against the competing perspectives that school administrators hold toward school library programs? This paper will examine the role LIS education programs play in connecting communication skills and school librarians. The paper will draw examples from LIS education, school libraries, and perspectives from Idaho specifically, as that is of particular importance to the author, but the implications of this study involve larger concerns for communication being emphasised within LIS education as a whole, especially for school librarians in relation to school administrators.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

### **Communication Concerns in Idaho:**

Recently, the spotlight has been on Idaho school libraries due to the 2010 *Idaho School Library Impact Study* commissioned by the Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICFL). As part of this research, school administrators reported on how they viewed ICT skills, school libraries and librarians, and teacher collaboration. Included in this survey were questions as to the value of regular meetings with school librarians and how these administrators formed their

---

<sup>1</sup>anonymous1 (personal communication, Nov. 8, 2010a)

<sup>2</sup>anonymous2 (personal communication, Nov 8, 2010b)

understanding of what school libraries and teacher-librarians do. The researchers reported their findings in recent issues of *School Library Monthly* (Lance et. al. 2010a) and *Teacher Librarian* (Lance et. al. 2010b). These journal articles focused on two of the clearer outcomes from this research. First, that there is a connection between school libraries being *seen* and how they are perceived. “Where administrators value strong library programs and can see them doing their part for student success, students are more likely to thrive academically. This is the over-arching conclusion that is drawn from the latest study of the impact of school libraries... (Lance et al. 2010a p.14).” The second outcome reported in *Teacher Librarian* is that collaboration between school librarians and teachers is valued by school administrators and has a positive impact on student success (Lance et. al. 2010b). When school administrators rated this collaboration as essential, they assessed their school’s teaching of ICT skills as excellent or good (Lance et al. 2010b, p. 32). This shows that there is a relationship between school librarian/teacher collaboration and ICT skills assessment, as well as state reading and language arts test scores. Yet, the article and study found that some school librarians reported that this valuable collaboration did not happen frequently and in some cases rarely or never happened at all (Lance et al., 2010b p.35; *Idaho School Library Impact Study 2010*). Clearly the *Idaho School Library Impact Study (2010)* and resulting articles show that school librarians need to be at forefront in communicating their value to administrators, whether this be through documented collaboration with teachers or simply moving school library services within sight of administrators.

### **School Administrator Education Perceptions on School Libraries:**

This concern over articulating the value of school libraries to administrators has been pointed out before to Idaho educators in an article in *The Idaho Librarian* that frames it as “the most critical problem of a school library” (Resolving... 1990). The article specifically points

out that there is indeed a communication gap within graduate level programs geared toward educational administrators as to what exactly an exceptional school library program looks like. The overarching assumption is that these budding administrators have had enough exposure to library programs in their teaching experiences to make an informed judgement as to their worth. This thought is reiterated within the findings of the *Idaho School Library Impact Study* (2010), as it found that on-the-job experience (81.3%) and personal experience (84.7%) were two of the strongest areas that school administrators used to determine the role of school libraries within their institutions (p.90). *The Idaho Librarian* article advocates for school librarians making the first step in developing an ongoing communication relationship with their principals as well as potentially adding a library component to educational administrator coursework (1990).

This concern is not unique to Idaho, as Alexander, Smith and Gary (2003) have rightly noted that school library media specialists (SLMS) “consider themselves vital to the success of schools and the achievement of students. No matter how highly SLMSs perceive themselves, their place in schools is marginalized if those who have decision-making power hold the opposite view ( Alexander et. al., 2003 p.10)”. It is these competing perceptions of value that is at the heart of the communication issue between school librarians and their administrators. This communication gap is critical to student success as it potentially has significant impact on student ICT skills assessment (*Idaho School Library Impact Study*, 2010). Alexander et. al. (2003) found that fewer than 10% of the principals surveyed had “ever taken a college course that included content on collaborating with (school library specialists)” (p11). Because of this education gap, it is suggested by the researchers that school librarians “should take advantage of every opportunity to collaborate with principals and educate them about professional roles, responsibilities, and services (p.11).” However, the article goes on to address that while there are many works within the professional literature that describe the specific roles of the

school librarian and administrator, there are very few resources which outline “strategies for establishing effective partnerships (p.10)”. Without effective strategies to build these partnerships, school librarians may well indeed fade into the background in regards to how school administrators view them.

### **School Librarians Role in Communicating to School Administrators:**

This lack of visibility has been an ongoing detriment to school libraries and librarians as pointed out by Hartzell, a former higher school principal (Hartzell, 1997; Hartzell 2003b). As Hartzell states in his aptly titled article ‘The Invisible School Librarian’, “educators are indifferent because libraries and librarians are largely invisible to them (Hartzell, 1997, p. 25).” Mainly, Hartzell suggests this lack of visibility is due to the fact there are relatively few librarians mentioned in educational administrator's textbooks and that the public perception of schools is often comprised of teaching, teachers and classrooms not librarians and libraries. Hartzell places the lack of visibility squarely in quarter of school librarians themselves, though they share some of the blame with their own education programs that trained them. As Hartzell points out, “Library media specialists have done a poor job of promoting themselves, partly because they have not been schooled in the need for it. Untutored in the reasons for acquiring visibility, power, and influence, or in the techniques to acquire them, school media specialists often do not systematically educate teachers and administrators about the value of a good library media center (Hartzell, 1997, p.26).”

In attempt to remedy this lack of visibility, Hartzell wrote a book, *Building Influence for School Librarians* (2003b) that contains chapters on librarian/principal relationships including communicating with principals, developing trust with principals, and building a strong relationship. Hartzell has also written articles advocating for librarians to raise their profile through effective communication (Hartzell 2003a). As a former school administrator, his voice is creditable in the argument for the need for increased communication skills for school librarians.

In a similar vein, the book *The Visible Librarian* (Siess 2003) attempts to pull libraries from the shadows by promoting communication related techniques such as marketing, public relations, and advocacy. These are all communication methods that promote the mission, learning connections, and success of school libraries. Levitov (2010) also places school librarians in the spotlight as the “central source for educating school administrators about library programs.” Librarians should do so on daily basis through meaningful communication and this communication role should not be “underestimated”. Indeed, administrators value these communication skills as Shannon (2009) points to research which shows that school administrators often value social traits over technical ones. Kaplan (2006) found that school administrators saw the “personality of the librarian” as one of the most serious obstacles to implementing a strong library program. Similarly, another study rated “ability to work with others” as a “top quality” (Roys and Brown 2004) sought by principals when hiring a school librarian. One could argue that these social traits contribute to an overall “communication personality” which school librarians should continue to build and refine. This is echoed in the research Shannon found by interviewing South Carolina principals for the qualities they look for in school librarians. An open-ended question in the research survey asked for additional competences that were desired when hiring school librarians. Of the the 39 substantive comments returned by school administrators, twenty-four “included something related to interpersonal, communication or ‘people’ skills (p.9).” Shannon notes that the interpersonal skills school librarian’s possess serve to reflect a “positive climate” for the library (p.18). The more successful a school librarian communicates the role of the library in a positive light to school administrators, the better it is perceived. As Shannon found interpersonal communication to be an essential skill by school administrators in hiring school librarians. This idea of communication as a desirable job skill for school librarians is supported in other research about wanted qualities and competences found in librarian job advertisements.



### **Communication as a Desired Job Quality:**

Effective communication is seen as a desired skill from employers of librarians of all types (Latham, 2003; Reeves & Bellardo 2010). A recent library job advertisement analysis undertaken by Reeves & Bellardo (2010) show that communication appeared as a desired skill in over 50% of the ads ( p.112). This result is similar to a study from 2002 which found communication mentioned in library and information professional advertisements at 37% overall but in near 50% of ads found in library specific employment sources such as *American Libraries* and the ASIS&T Jobline. “Employers are seeking to hire individuals who not only have certain skills and experience, but also certain personal attributes such as excellent communication abilities....” among others. “It is not immediately apparent how these attributes can be taught - or whether they can be taught. Nevertheless, job applicants cannot ignore the fact that employers prefer individuals who have these personal attributes (Reeves & Bellardo 2010 p. 118).”

### **Communication in LIS Education:**

The library and professional literature strongly support the premise that communication is a necessary skill for school librarians, and librarians in general, but how has the LIS curriculum prepared librarians toward this end? In 2002, Irwin revisited previous studies on mandatory and core LIS course catalog descriptions in order to provide a better understanding of LIS education as whole (Irwin 2002). The study examined the courses at 48 ALA accredited institutions. Sadly, the term “communication” (or a variant of) was not present as one of the top terms noted in catalog descriptions and course titles. While his emphasis was mainly on writing, Latham noted in 2002 that very few LIS programs teach courses specifically in technical and professional communication (p.155). His study found that only seven schools offered courses

that could be “construed as focusing on professional communication (p.157). Therefore it should not be surprising that many practicing librarians may have underdeveloped communication skills.

The literature and research establishes that communication is indeed a critical skill for school librarians in the 21st century. How well then are they being prepared toward this end?

## **METHODOLOGY**

For this paper, a three-part research approach was used, similar to the manner deployed by Latham (2002) in his study of written communication within LIS programs. The approach was thus:

1. An analysis of LIS school curriculum was undertaken to determine how many, if any, schools offer a course in communication. This was accomplished by reviewing the websites of ALA accredited LIS schools and examining course titles and available course descriptions. Communication was defined broadly in terms of advocacy, marketing and communication (organizational, interpersonal, or writing). Courses on scholarly communication were not included in this analysis. A total 57 institutions were examined, including conditional programs. The websites at the University of Montreal and the University of Puerto Rico were not in English and thus were removed from consideration. This brought the actual total of programs examined to 55 schools.

2. In addition, a review of available descriptions for introductory school librarianship courses was undertaken for communication concepts and themes similar to the ones described above. This analysis was intended to capture communication themes which were not specifically described in LIS course titles, as well as determine any emphasis of specific interest to school librarianship. There were 36 course descriptions examined.

3. Finally, a selective review of the LIS program mission, course descriptions, and available introductory school library course syllabi was undertaken for communication concepts. This review was limited to four ALA accredited schools: University of Washington, San Jose State University, Emporia State University, and University of North Texas. These schools were chosen because they are of particular interest to Idaho with the impact of their distance programs or geographical proximity<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, the programs at College of Southern Idaho and University of Idaho that support the Education Media Generalist Endorsement for the state were included in this analysis to assure particular relevance to LIS education in Idaho.

---

<sup>3</sup>Confirmed by personal communication with Continuing Education Consultant at the Idaho Commission for Libraries (Nov. 9th, 2010)

## RESULTS

1. A total of 37 courses involving communication were identified. These courses were spread over 27 schools, or 49% of the LIS programs. (see Table 1)

**Table 1: Number of LIS communication courses**

<b>Course:</b>	<b>Number:</b>
<b>Communication</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Advocacy</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Marketing/Public Relations</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>37</b>

2. Of the available school library descriptions examined for introductory school librarianship courses, only one listed “communication” specifically, in relation to ICT skills. The term “marketing” was not used. However, both “advocacy” and “public relations” returned 3 results each.

3. The SLIM program outcomes at Emporia State University includes that their graduates will be able to “lead appropriate change by using effective collaborative, communication and organizational skills” and “communication effectively in writing, orally, and in using information technologies.”<sup>4</sup> In addition, the SLIM program draws from the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the Conceptual Framework of the Teachers College at Emporia State. This framework states that students will have knowledge of and the skill to be effective communicators and develop a “positive learning environment”. Emporia did not list a course specifically for advocacy, communication, or marketing. However, the 2010 syllabus available

---

<sup>4</sup><http://slim.emporia.edu/index.php/prospective-students/mission-vision-statements/>

online for the course “Managing the School Library Media Center” (LI 851)<sup>5</sup> contains an entire module dealing with advocacy, which states students “will discover the role of the library media specialist in promoting advocacy, public relations and marketing for the library media center”.

The iSchool at the University of Washington does not specifically articulate communication as part of their vision and mission<sup>6</sup>; instead, it focuses on the relationship between information and the profession. The iSchool offers a course in Marketing and Planning for Libraries (LIS 581) as well as mentions marketing in the course Management of Information Organizations (LIS 580) and reader services classes. There is a specific course for Public Libraries and Advocacy (LIS 586) but a course in vein for school libraries was not noted nor was a online syllabus readily available for the introductory school librarianship course to examine if communication concepts were being taught.

The goals and objectives of the MLIS program at University of North Texas<sup>7</sup> included an objective which stated students would be able to “demonstrate communication skills necessary for personal and professional growth, leadership, interaction and collaboration in appropriate professional contexts.” There were no identified courses which contained advocacy in their course description. Marketing was mentioned in two courses. These courses dealt with publishing and law librarianship respectively. Communication was mentioned mainly in courses that dealt with specific subject disciplines such as medical librarianship, social science or humanities information sources, or scholarly publishing. There was not an introductory school library syllabus readily available online to analyze.

---

<sup>5</sup>[http://slim.emporia.edu/Forms/syllabus/syllabus\\_display.cfm?CourseCode=851XI2010](http://slim.emporia.edu/Forms/syllabus/syllabus_display.cfm?CourseCode=851XI2010)

3

<sup>6</sup><http://ischool.uw.edu/printpdf/strategic-plan/mission>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.lis.unt.edu/main/ViewPage.php?cid=34>

The mission and values of San Jose State University's School of Information Sciences<sup>8</sup> does not specifically list communication as an outcome in LIS education. However, the statement of core competencies<sup>9</sup> states that graduates of the program will be able to "demonstrate oral and written communication skills necessary for group work, collaborations and professional level presentations." Further, the program offers a course in Interpersonal Communication Skills for Librarians (LIBR 286) as a well as course on marketing titled Marketing of Information Products and Services (LIBR 283). In the description of the Teacher-Librarian Services credential<sup>10</sup> they emphasize that "the teacher librarian impacts K-12 student outcomes by collaborating with teachers, working directly with students, championing reading, provide information-rich learning environments, and *advocating* for information literacy." In the Fall 2010 School Library Media course overview online<sup>11</sup>, one of the course objectives is that "students will demonstrate an ability to plan and advocate for an effective library media programs."

The University of Idaho offers an undergraduate Library Science minor, which according to the 2009/2010 catalog<sup>12</sup> requires that 12 of the 24 credits taken be in the "areas of selection, organization, and administration of library materials." The minor also requires that students take six credits from "Communication/graphic arts". None of the course descriptions listed communication, advocacy, marketing or public relations. In addition, there was no specific

---

<sup>8</sup><http://slisweb.sjsu.edu/slis/mission.htm>

<sup>9</sup><http://slisweb.sjsu.edu/slis/competencies.htm>

<sup>10</sup><http://slisweb.sjsu.edu/classes/teacherlibrarian.htm>

<sup>11</sup><http://slisapps.sjsu.edu/gss/ajax/showSheet.php?id=1968>

<sup>12</sup><http://www.students.uidaho.edu/catalogs/>

mission, visions, or core competencies statements identified specifically with this minor.

The College of Southern Idaho offers an Associate of Arts degree in Library Science. The degree's mission, values, goals and objectives, and student learning outcomes<sup>13</sup> includes various statements on communication. "Open communication" is listed under Values. As part of the vision for this program they state: "We will promote communication, collaboration, and partnerships." One objective for this degree is to "provide opportunities to develop and practice: critical thinking, problem-solving, *communication*, organization, and leadership skills." Finally, graduates of the program are expected to "summarize, synthesize, and communicate information in a variety of programs" as a student learning outcome. Degree students are also required to take a three credit course on oral communication.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

As practitioners in the field have noted, communication training is indeed lacking in their background preparation to become school librarians. Informal discussions with current school librarians in Idaho have yielded responses such as: "I can tell you for certain, I have never had any instruction or advising on how to communicate with school principals or district administrators"<sup>14</sup> and "I don't recall receiving any training on how to deal with administrators"<sup>15</sup>. This theme of lack of preparedness from LIS training and education was repeated throughout library literature in a variety of contexts, including advocacy (Hartzell 1997), job qualifications for librarian positions (Latham, 2002), or desired traits by school administrators (Shannon 2009). The results from this study shows an increase of ALA accredited LIS programs offering courses related to communication as compared to the study undertaken by Latham in 2002, a difference of 49% in 2010 to 13% in 2002. However, it must be noted that Latham

---

<sup>1</sup><http://www.csi.edu/liis/mission.asp>

<sup>1</sup>anonymous3 (personal communication, Nov 8, 2010c)

<sup>1</sup>anonymous4 (personal communication, Nov 11, 2010)

was specifically interested in professional communication in the context of writing. But to reiterate his concern, “(g)iven the relatively high number of job announcements that mention communication skills, it is somewhat surprising that so few LIS schools have courses in professional communication (p. 158).” While there seems to be a gain in LIS schools which do offer some form of a communication library course, 51% still have not risen to this need.

LIS education has emphasized the importance of educating librarians in marketing or public relations over writing, as these courses are offered more often (21 times). However, the context of these marketing/public relations courses are not specific to school librarianship. The detailed examination of available introductory school library course descriptions did not illuminate specific connections between school librarianship and communication skills, as the findings noted surprisingly few mentions of advocacy (3) or public relations (3). Upon closer examination of two specific syllabi for introductory school libraries courses available at Emporia State University and San Jose State University, both showed that advocacy was included as part of the course. Yet, it is questionable whether a single course module, a week-long emphasis, or a single assignment is enough to transfer this important skill. Obviously, this connection between school librarians, communication skills and school administrators is not a “trend” or a “current issue” or “special topic” but a systemic and ongoing concern for the success of school libraries. Students would benefit more from an entire LIS course devoted to this complex and subtle skill-set, including substantive practice and practical experiences upon which a school librarian could build on and directly apply in the library once employed?

One could argue that communication concepts are embedded within the whole LIS curriculum albeit not specifically mentioned in the course descriptions. The examination of the program’s mission, values, goal and objectives, and student outcomes supports this contention. Indeed, some LIS programs are apart of academic colleges of communication, which would lead



one to think that communication was a strength. That may not necessarily be the case, such as the example of the University of Alabama, which does not include a marketing, advocacy, communication, or a public relations course in its masters-level course list. If communication is simply taught to students as an embedded yet unarticulated component of the coursework, it becomes problematic for pre-service librarians, schools, and faculty to point to where these crucial skills have been taught, transferred, and assessed. How are students able to refer to which course(s) their experiences, expectations, and understandings of librarian/principal communication will be developed if they are not implicitly identified in course titles or descriptions?

Many LIS schools include courses on human-computer interface communication but neglect specific coursework on human to human interaction, other than user services, information-seeking behavior, or the reference interview. As we need to understand the information needs of library users we also need to understand how decision-makers directly impact a library, such as how principals “interface” with teacher-librarians.

## **A BRIEF PROFILE OF A PRINCIPAL / SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR**

Libraries are already adept at profiling their user populations. Librarians profile patrons or readers into categories such as students, children, young adults, millennials, digital natives, teens, etc. These categorizations allow libraries to better serve their users with the proper materials, professional technique, and communication strategies. School librarians would do well to profile one of their primary patrons: the school principal educational administrator. This patron may not check out books but definitely reaps the rewards of school library services and the most impact upon school librarian success.

Most principals begin their career as teachers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). This

fact potentially impacts how school librarians are perceived by principals as indicated in the *Idaho School Library Impact Study* (2010), since most school administrators receive their understanding of librarians from on-the-job experiences. These perceptions were most likely formed by their experiences as teachers.

The average age of school principals is forty-nine years old (NCES 2009). This indicates that many school principals are not “born digital” age and might not be aware of technologies that impact library use and effectiveness. The average breakdown between gender of principals is 51% female and 49% male (NCES 2009). Most principals require a master’s degree in education administration or educational leadership (BLS, 2010). While this added coursework is desirable, previous studies have shown this is not a space where school administrators necessarily increase their understanding of the the school library ( “Resolving the Most Critical Problem...”, 1990; Hartzell,1997; Alexander et. al. 2003;O’Neal 2004; Levitov 2009, Levitov, 2010). This fact was reiterated in the *Idaho School Library Impact Study* (2010), which noted that teacher and school administrator education programs may be “doing a less effective job than those of earlier years at teaching future administrators about school libraries and librarians (p.94). However, Levitov (2009) demonstrated that administrator education programs are a potentially rich space to inform administrators about the importance of library media specialists.

While this is a rudimentary profile of school administrators, it is worth noting since school librarians are charged with developing their own profile with their respective principals and school administrators. While this responsibility may reside with the school librarian, a LIS program would do well to equip those wishing to go into the profession of school librarianship with the criteria and tools to assess and develop these profiles. For example, school librarians may want to learn to match the communication styles of principals with appropriate communication strategies, or learn how to align school library priorities with the educational language and concepts which would be most receptive to principals. LIS programs would make greate

## BRIEF PROFILE OF LIBRARIAN EDUCATION IN IDAHO

The results of the study conducted in this paper and the findings of the *Idaho School Impact Study* (2010) suggest that school librarians, and in particular, librarians in Idaho, need to better communicate their value to principals and administrators. An appropriate place to learn how to best advocate for school libraries is within the LIS education pre-service librarians receive. LIS education occurs by two methods: through LIS graduate programs, or through an Educational Media Endorsement. First, students can attend schools nearby or via distance education courses such as those offered at the University of Washington, San Jose State University, or Emporia State University. Recently, the University of North Texas has offered a graduate LIS program to a cohort of students across four states in the northwest and mountain plains which include Idaho<sup>16</sup>. Unfortunately, a graduate degree is not currently required to be a school librarian in Idaho; the main vehicle for the LIS education of school librarians in Idaho is through the Educational Media Endorsement, which secondary school librarians are required to have. The two schools which support this endorsement through LIS coursework is the University of Idaho and College of Southern Idaho. It is heartening to see a communication class as a requirement for both schools, yet the *Idaho School Library Impact Study* may put these courses into question for school librarians. This discrepancy might be attributed to the fact that elementary school libraries in Idaho do not require an Educational Media Endorsement for their librarians. It is impressive to see the College of Southern Idaho articulate communication as a program goal in all of its statements related to mission, vision, goals and objects, and student outcomes. Unlike many of the other LIS programs examined, the degree at the College of Southern Idaho requires that graduates enroll in a basic communication course. Although this

---

<sup>1</sup>The SWIM program :South Dakota, Wyoming Idaho, Montana (<http://www.lis.unt.edu/main/ViewPage.php?cid=210>)

communication course is not designed to be specific to the needs of effectively conveying the value of school libraries to school administrators at the very least it is doing more than some graduate LIS programs to incorporate communication within their curriculum.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:**

Based on the results of this study, it would be worthwhile for LIS schools to examine how they teach communication within their programs. It very well may be that communication is an embedded outcome within the program overall. But one might question, based on the literature if this concept is being transferred to school librarians in a meaningful manner. A detailed examination of LIS syllabi is warranted to reveal where communication is emphasized and assessed. It is possible that communication may be a subset of leadership or management courses taught within the LIS curriculum but that has yet to be analysed in any great detail. I am optimistic that communication, advocacy, and marketing are skills valued by LIS programs but it is unclear where and when these skills are taught.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Library literature indicates that effective communication is critical skill needed by school librarians. School administrators are not receiving adequate training on the importance and value of school libraries and their impact on learning and achievement. In educating school librarians to be effective teachers of ICT, as well as collaborating with teachers, LIS programs are charging them with being active participants in the educational mission of the schools they may work in. However, if principals do not value this contribution, or have a competing perspective of a school librarian's intended role, librarians need to be armed with communication, advocacy, and marketing skills to remedy misconceptions and stereotypes. The responsibility is mainly on librarians to break down this wall of misunderstanding. LIS programs

do well to provide evidence-based research to support the school librarian's impact and role.

This research unfortunately doesn't necessary speak for itself in regards to principal priorities for school library programs. As such, one of the most important roles of a school librarian is to learn the most effective methods to get this message across. The findings in the *Idaho School Library Impact Study* (2010) indicates this is a critical message, for when principals see libraries "doing their part for student success, students are more likely to thrive academically (Lance et al. 2010a).

As it is the responsibility of the school librarian to convey the value of school libraries to their administrators, so too should it be the responsibility of LIS programs to develop communication skill-sets among their students to help craft this message. As this study indicates, only half of LIS programs specifically address communication concepts such as marketing, advocacy or other communication subjects as specific courses. The LIS schools examined did include communication concerns as part of their overall student outcomes, but without a sustained and specific program geared toward school librarianship, it is unclear if school librarians are getting the skills they need.

WORKS CITED

Alexander, L. B., Smith, R. C., & Carey, J. O. (2003). Education Reform and the School Library Media Specialist: Perceptions of Principals. *Knowledge Quest*, 32, 2, 10-1

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition*, Education Administrators, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos007.htm> (visited November 09, 2010).

Chan, C. (2008). The Impact of School Library Services on Student Achievement and the Implications for Advocacy: A Review of the Literature. *Access*, 22, 4.

Estrella, J (June 15, 2010) Boise School District adopts tight 2010-2011 budget. *Idaho Statesman*. Retrieved: November 10, 2010. <http://www.idahostatesman.com/2010/06/15/1231621/boise-adopts-tight-2010-2011-budget.html#ixzz15lIK05Ky>

Hartzell, G. N. (1997). The Invisible School Librarian: Why Other Educators Are Blind to Your Value. *School Library Journal*, 43, 11, 24-29.

Hartzell, G. (2003a). The Power of Audience: Effective Communication with Your Principal. *Library Media Connection*, 22, 2.

Hartzell, G. N. (2003b). *Building influence for the school librarian: Tenets, targets & tactics*. Worthington, Ohio: Linworth Pub.

*Idaho School Library Impact Study - 2009: How Idaho Librarians, Teachers, and Administrators*

*Collaborate for Student Success* Idaho Commission For Libraries (2010) [http://](http://libraries.idaho.gov/doc/idaho-school-library-impact-study-2009)

[libraries.idaho.gov/doc/idaho-school-library-impact-study-2009](http://libraries.idaho.gov/doc/idaho-school-library-impact-study-2009)

Irwin, R. (2002). Characterizing the Core: What Catalog Descriptions of Mandatory Course Reveal About LIS Schools and Librarianship. *Journal of Education for Library & Information Science*, 43, 2.)

Jones, P. A. J. (2003). The Executive Briefing: A Management Tool for Improving Communication between School Library Media Specialists and Their Principals. *Knowledge Quest*, 32, 2, 30-34.

Kaplan, A. G. (2006). *Benign neglect: Principals' knowledge of and attitudes towards school library media specialists*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Delaware.

Lance, K. C., Rodney, M. J., & Schwarz, B. (2010a). The Impact of School Libraries on Academic Achievement: A Research Study Based on Responses from Administrators in Idaho. *School Library Monthly*, 26, 9, 14-17.

Lance, K. C., Rodney, M J, & Schwarz, B. (2010b). Collaboration works--when it happens! The Idaho School Library impact study. *Teacher Librarian*, 37, 5. p.30(7).

Latham, D. (2002). The Role of Technical and Professional Communication in the LIS Curriculum. *Journal of Education for Library & Information Science*, 43, 2.)

- Levitov D. (2009). Perspectives of school administrators related to school library media programs after participating in an online course. 'School library advocacy for administrators'. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri
- Levitov, D. (2010). Educating School Administrators. *School Library Monthly*, 26, 6.)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). ( 2009). "Table 3. Percentage distribution of school principals by age category, average and median age of principals, and percentage distribution of principals, by sex, school type, and selected school characteristics: 2007–08". *Characteristics of Public, Private, and Bureau of Indian Education Elementary and Secondary School Principals in the United States*. Retrieved November 10, 2010. [http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009323/tables/sass0708\\_2009323\\_p12n\\_03.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009323/tables/sass0708_2009323_p12n_03.asp)
- O'Neal, A. J. (2004). Administrators', Teachers', and Media Specialists' Perceptions of the Roles of Media Specialists in the Schools' Instructional Programs: Implications for Instructional Administration. *Journal of Education for Library & Information Science*, 45, 4.)
- Reeves, R. K., & Bellardo, H. T. (2010). Job Advertisements for Recent Graduates: Advising, Curriculum, and Job-seeking Implications. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 51, 2, 103
- "Resolving the most critical problem of a school library" (1990), *Idaho Librarian* 42, 46-48
- Roys, N. K. and Brown, M. E. (2004). The ideal candidate for library media specialist: Views



from school administrators, library school faculty, and MLS students. *School Library Media Research*, 7. <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/slmrb/slmrcontents/volume72004/candidate.cfm>

School libraries work! (2008). Scholastic. Retrieved Nov. 1, 2010, from:

<http://listbuilder.scholastic.com/content/stores/LibraryStore/pages/images/SLW3.pdf>

Shannon, D.. (2009). Principals' Perspectives of School Librarians. *School Libraries Worldwide*, 15(2), 1-22. Retrieved November 11, 2010, from ProQuest Education Journals.

Siess, J. A. (2003). *The visible librarian: Asserting your value with marketing and advocacy*. Chicago: American Library Association.

---