
The decline in the number of school librarians throughout the United States could have far reaching consequences for students and teachers. In an increasingly digital environment, many believe the school librarian to be an antiquated concept. The development of exceptional library programs through the use of evidence-based practices cements the role of librarian as valuable instructional and resource partner. The role of the librarian in shaping the attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions of stakeholders directly affects the perception of value.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the role of the school librarian in implementing evidence-based practice through semi structured interviews. Nowhere is this more important than in school libraries where building a strong library program will begin with collecting and disseminating empirical evidence. Interviews revealed that school librarians are participating in collecting and sharing data, but it does not have the same qualities of rigorously methodical science. Library science is, at its core, a social sciences and librarians have managed to create a model for collecting data that applies to the environment where they are teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator. The ambivalence regarding whether the collection of data by school librarians should be labeled ‘evidence based practice’ remains uncertain.

Headings:

School libraries – Research

School libraries – Standards

School libraries – Evaluation

School librarians – Evaluation

Evidence-based library science
THE EFFECTS OF EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE ON THE
CHANGING ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

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Introduction

There is a growing trend among American school districts of eradicating or reducing the number of school librarians, which has far reaching consequences for both educators and students. The dramatic decline in school librarian positions is not limited to small districts or to specific parts of the United States. According to the American Library Association, there are currently 81,200 school librarians in the United States (ALA Library Fact Sheet, 2015). In 1991, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania public schools had 176 certified librarians (Kachel, 2015, para. 10) Today there are 10. In 2014, New York City public schools reported having 700 school libraries (Morrison, 2016, para. 5). In 2005, the district boasted nearly 1,500 school libraries. Ohio has lost more than 700 positions over the last decade and the ratio of school librarians to students is 1-to-7,000 in California (Peterson, 2014, para. 1). In 2011, there were 2,303 school librarians in NC. That number decreased by 6 percent to 2,168 in 2015 (Helms, 2015, para. 14). These are just a few examples of the declining numbers of school librarians in school districts across the United States.

The 2009 economic downturn has had a serious impact on both school and public libraries. A survey conducted as part of the Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study revealed nearly 20 percent of libraries reporting a 5-10 percent budget reduction from 2009-2010 (Davis, 2009, p.6). A tough economy and, in some districts, drastic budget cuts mean that school librarians are now more than ever required to become advocates for their school library programs. Doug Johnson, Director of
technology for Burnsville-Eagen-Savage, Minnesota public school states, the job of “a school library media specialist (is) too important to too many children to let budget reductions that impact your program just 'happen.' Get active, ask for support, and heed the words of Dylan Thomas – 'Do not go gentle into that good night” (Advocacy: NCSLMA, 2015, Advocacy).

A recent article in the Charlotte Observer titled Are School Librarians Going the Way of the Milkman? articulates the very real threat to the school library profession. In Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, teacher librarians are being replaced by staff that are neither certified nor librarians. When a school library is run by uncertified staff, students are missing the opportunities for learning and growth that distinguishes a program implemented by a certified librarian. Deborah Kachel, a professor of School Library and Information Technologies at the University of Pennsylvania states, “from coast to coast, elementary and high school libraries are being neglected, defunded, repurposed, abandoned and closed” (Kachel, 2015, para. 13).

Over the past 50 years, education in the United States has undergone numerous reforms. During the 1960’s and 70’s, the government pushed to bring about equity reform for minorities, women and girls, children with disabilities, and children in poverty with federal programs and legal and civil rights statutes (Jennings, 2012, p.3). School choice has also shaped American education and includes publicly funded vouchers and tax credits for private school tuition, charter schools, and public school choice plans. Standards based reform has also dominated and changed the American school landscape. The standards based movement has morphed into a test-driven accountability in which students show mastery of skills through standardized testing.
The consequences of students not reaching established goals rests on the shoulders of schools and has driven ‘teaching to the test.’ The standards movement and a move towards Common Core has been an attempt to clarify what needs to be learned and has not only changed what is taught, but how it is taught. Federal funding for education reached $536 billion during the 2004-2005 school year, an increase of $9.3 billion dollars from 2001 (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2005, para. 2). Currently, states have the primary responsibility to fund education through a variety of laws and programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, by the end of the 2004-05 school year, national K-12 education spending will have increased an estimated 105 percent since 1991-92 (US Dept. of Education, 2005, para. 5). An analysis by the Committee for Education Funding, an advocacy organization located in Washington, D.C., found that while spending increased, it was mostly spent to stave off teacher layoffs, to fund student tuition assistance programs such as Pell Grants, early childhood education, and Title I funding (Camera, 2016, para. 3). The goal is “to make sure that kids graduate high school with the knowledge and skills to succeed in college and, ultimately, to contribute to an increasingly competitive global workforce” (Hill, 2012, p. 26).

The adoption of Common Core standards and STEM highlights what school librarians already teach: namely expertise in evaluating online media, using interactive media, and literacy with a focus on nonfiction texts. Resources necessary for Common Core make collaboration between teachers and librarians more important than ever. School libraries can become the hub for school learning if the librarian is willing to embrace new services and technologies and understand the dynamic role of the school librarian. The federally funded Improving Literacy Through School Libraries (LSL)
program was funded between 2002 and 2010 in order to, “improve student literacy skills and academic achievement by providing schools with up-to-date library materials and to ensure that school library media centers are staffed by state-certified school library media specialists” (ALA: Advocacy, 2015, para. 1). The program was defunded in 2011. Abby Moore, instructor at UNCC College of Education states that, “a school that doesn’t have a certified media specialist is not a 21st-century school” (Helms, 2015).

School librarians have the unique role of supporting learning on a school-wide level. Studies have shown that having a certified school librarian increases test scores and can help moderate the gaps in literacy and technology education. According to the American Academy of School Librarians (AASL), school librarians “empower students to be critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers and ethical users of information (AASL, 2009, p. 8). Assessing library programs to foster creativity and innovation means meeting challenges and being willing to retool programs in order to meet the needs of school learners. As a professional member of both the school and library community, school librarians must focus on professional development to remain current and viable through leadership roles in the school community and developing as an information partner and information specialist.

As school libraries endeavor to remain relevant in a budget-strained environment, the push to support technology must be grounded in learning and inquiry. According to Jessamyn West in her New York Times article School Librarians: Assessing the Unassessable, a school librarian is “more of a discerning cultivator and a matchmaker between people and the widely varied resources that meet their information needs” (West, 2011, para. 4). School librarians must embrace collaboration
with colleagues, advocate for the library, support student literacy, and embrace new services and technologies in order to remain current and viable. Understanding more about evidence-based practices used by librarians to create exemplary programs is crucial to remaining current and understanding library services in a digital age. Though evidence-based behaviors and methods have become an essential aspect to the future of school libraries, research is limited as to the use of these practices among professionals. It is essential that school librarians collect and disseminate their findings and move from simply advocating for the benefits of school library programs to proving it through data collection and evidence-based practice.

The role of the school librarian has changed dramatically in the last few years from keeper of books and materials to teacher and collaborator to instructional and educational partner. School libraries have evolved from traditional libraries that support a school curriculum to places of digital learning as well as supporting students’ social, cultural, and academic achievements. Carol A. Gordon establishes that information literacy has replaced bibliographic instruction as best practice in the school library (Gordon, 2016, p. 133). The school librarian is essential to support both recreational and instructional resources for all students, provide open access to technology, and align teaching to curricular standards while collaborating with teachers (NCSLMA: Advocacy, 2015, para. 2). As members of the school’s teaching team, school librarians play a significant role in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational curriculum with a particular focus on information literacy (Gillespie, 2014, Introduction). However, the dynamic field of education is rife with drastic budget cuts which now plague and threaten to destroy many school library programs. It is essential for the
success of the profession for librarians to learn to advocate and persuade administrators and stakeholders that both the library and the position of teacher librarian hold value for the school as school library programs continue to undergo momentous changes. School librarians can take an active leadership role and advocate for the library, programs, and collection development. However, without an understanding of best practices for the school library, the librarian is destined to merely remain an advocate of programs. According to Ross Todd in The Evidence-Based Manifesto, when a library is “disconnected from best practices and best thinking….by default, often resorts to advocacy rather than evidence to survive” (Todd, 2008, para. 32). Evidence-based practice and the establishment of best practices demonstrate value and can aid in overcoming the disconnect between the perception and reality of what the school library media coordinator does.

As the role of school librarians becomes more tenuous, it is essential that librarians understand their professional responsibilities and integrate best practices into their programs. Stakeholders will begin to recognize the benefits of having school library programs in schools through advocacy and through the effective implementation of state and national standards. Research shows that librarians who regularly participate with administration in evaluating school library programs, consistently participate in advocacy efforts for the school library program, and act in a leadership role stand a better chance of keeping their position as educators (Ewbank, 2011, para. 55). Unfortunately, the value of the school librarian is often misunderstood by principals, other teachers, parents, and other stakeholders such as the public-at-large.
Evidence-based practices illustrate value, are essential to develop best practices for a strong school library program, and present school librarianship as a ‘future ready profession’ (Haricombe, 2016). In this study, interviews of school librarians analyzed the use of evidence-based practices in school libraries, the tools, successes and challenges, and implications for understanding standardized best practices for school library programs. The future of school libraries hangs in the balance. According to former school librarian and first lady, Laura Bush, “every child in America should have access to a well-stocked school library…. An investment in libraries is an investment in our children’s future” (Bush, n.d.).

**Literature Review**

School librarians are essential to help bridge the digital divide and to help students become critical thinkers and lifelong learners. Evidence-based practice provides school librarians with tools that inform practice and, ultimately prove value. The role of the school librarian is constantly evolving as programs are created to meet student information and literacy needs. An understanding of the importance of the practice of librarianship results in the essential support of the school librarian and programs by administration. Research shows that school library programs with certified librarians have been linked to improved student achievement levels. School librarians are also teacher librarians that model and teach information literacy skills, support curriculum, and act as the hub of the school. value of the school library program and the need for the school librarian.
The Evolving Role of School Librarians and Administrative Support

Evidence-based practice developed in the medical community as a way to apply research evidence/data to clinical decision making, but has become prevalent in many other professional areas including librarianship. While evidence-based library and information practice was originally used by health science librarians, it has grown to include librarians from various fields including schools, public, academic, law, and special libraries (Koufogiannakis & Brettle, 2016, p.8). According to Denise Koufogiannakis and Alison Brettle, evidence-based library and information practice is an "approach to professional decision making" that provides a structured approach to problem solving. Evidence-based practice involves questioning, gathering or creating evidence, and using evidence to best meet the needs of the community (p.3). Although evidence-based practice has become a buzzword in the last few years, understanding the implications and benefits of utilizing evidence-based practice and ultimately using that to develop best practices is essential in the current climate surrounding the library profession. In the article Moonshots for Management, Gary Hamel asks the following questions that are as pertinent to libraries as they are to business:

How in an age of rapid change do you create organizations that are as adaptable and resilient as they are focused and efficient? How in a world where the winds of creative destruction blow at gale force can a company innovate quickly and boldly enough to stay relevant and profitable? How in a creative economy where entrepreneurial genius is the secret to success do you inspire employees to bring the gifts of initiative, imagination, and passion to work every day? How at a time when the once hidden costs of industrialization have become distressingly apparent do you encourage executives to fulfill their responsibilities to all stakeholders? (Hamel, 2009, para. 6).
Peter Drucker said “what gets measured gets improved” (Shore, 2016, para. 4). Nowhere is this more important than in school libraries where building a strong library program will begin with collecting and disseminating empirical evidence.

In recent years, school librarians have moved from being the ‘keeper of the books’ and being fundamentally responsible for the organization and circulation of materials to instructional and educational partners. The school library has morphed from a confined space filled with materials to a fluid entity complete with collaboration and curricular implications that touch on all aspects of learning. According to researcher Todd (2015), evidence-based practice “forms a framework for reflective experience and understanding of the needs of...students and for judicious use of research-derived evidence to make judgments and decisions about how to enact instructional and service roles of the school library to meet the goals of the school” (Todd, 2015, para. 5). As library budgets become smaller, demonstrating the value and contributions of the library becomes essential to the profession. In order to demonstrate the value and contributions of the library program, school librarians must recognize the value of evidence-based practice and begin to use it. School librarians need to fully gain an understanding of best practices in order to create a library that excels in collaboration with teachers, demonstrates positive learning outcomes, and receives support from school administration and stakeholders. School librarianship can be described as a ‘future ready profession’ and one that readily embraces change. As Melissa Bass said in *The Politics and Civics of National Service*, “if you're not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem” (Bass, 2013, p.123).
Developed by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), the Pre-Service Toolkit for Principals and Teachers through the AASL Educators of School Librarians Sections (ESLS) strives to help pre-service principals and teachers understand the value of the school library program and develop instructional collaboration between teacher and librarian. It is not enough to assume that principal and teacher education programs will lead to a well-developed understanding of the value of school library programs, rather school librarians must rely on developing evidence-based practices and, ultimately, best practices in order to educate stakeholders.

Principal-School Library Media Relations as Perceived by Selected North Carolina Elementary Principals and School Library Media Specialists examines the perceived role of the school media specialist according to the principal (Campbell, 1991). Additionally, it considers the opinions of the school librarian on relationships and perceptions of administration. According to Campbell’s research, many school principals believe that school libraries are best left to their own management (1991, “Change Role of the Principals,” p.7). This stems from the fact that principal training programs do not include information about school library media programs in either courses or in textbooks and demonstrates the need for school librarians to stop advocating and start proving their worth by utilizing evidence-based practice. The article Benign Neglect: Principals’ Knowledge of and Attitudes Towards School Library Media Specialists proposes a professional development program for preservice and in-service school principals that will help principals become aware of the instructional role of the school library media program in the school curriculum and will raise principals’ expectations of
the school library media program and specialists (Kaplan, 2006). Essentially, librarians are an untapped school resource. It is “equally important [that the] principal creat[es] a school environment where student library use and faculty/library interaction are valued and promoted” (Hartzell, 2002, para. 6).

Many principals overlook libraries and librarians as potentially powerful instruments because they have not been educated to the library's value and library media research rarely appears in administrator publications (Wilson & Blake, 1993). Collaboration and coordination between school librarians and principals/administrators is key to creating an outstanding school library program. Developing a positive working relationship and creating a shared vision of both library and school wide success with administration can positively influence the value of the library and affect the allotted budget. Advocating for the school library means educating the administration about the benefits, successes, and needs of the library.

**Evidence-Based Practice and Advocacy**

In the article *Prove It! Putting Together the Evidence-Based Practice Puzzle*, Hannah Byrd Little writes, “evidence-based practice is a tool for leadership rather than simply a tool of advocacy” (Little, 2015, p. 67). Additionally, evidence-based practices which lead to best practices across the profession clearly illustrate that school libraries are as essential aspect to student growth and achievement. Collecting meaningful evidence that connects the school library to student achievement not only illustrates the value of library programs, but allows librarians to continue to target student needs.

Evidence-based practices, or documenting how the school library impacts student achievement, is fundamental to the survival of school library programs. Best
practices, or methods or techniques that have “consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means” should be developed and used to accomplish profession-wide standards of excellence (Business Dictionary, n.d.). Evidence-based practices lead to best practices and are essential to the viability of the school library program. In The Evidence-Based Manifesto for School Librarians, Ross Todd, the director of Rutgers University’s Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL) states that if school librarians “can't prove they make a difference, they may cease to exist” (Todd, 2008). Todd remarks that the value of the school library can be measured and the “learning outcomes, as well as personal, social, and cultural growth can be documented” (Todd, 2008, para. 4). Sustainable development of school libraries is dependent upon stakeholder's understanding of the library's crucial role, which is underscored by demonstrating outcomes, progress, and professional practices. Carol Gordon states in Being Evidence Based in Library and Information Practice that school libraries are more important now than ever as we change to a model of digital learning (Gordon, 2016, p.133).

School librarians are responsible for creating school library programs that are tailored to the unique needs of their school community. When librarians become familiar with the needs of the school community, they are able to rely on their professional experience and expertise to create short and long-term goals that can meet those needs. When school librarians use evidence-based practice, they can feel empowered to demonstrate the value of the school library program by merging theory and practice. Librarians must develop, implement, and assess their program using data that is specific to their school population (Kachel, 2015). The IFLA School Library Guides, 2
edition states that “monitoring and evaluating school library service and programs, as well as the work of the school library staff, should be conducted on a regular basis to ensure that the school library is meeting the changing needs of the school community” (2015, p. 10). Evaluation must guide the programs of the library in order to best meet the needs of students and teachers.

Value and Impact of the School Library Program

Keith Curry Lance and Linda Hofschire developed a study published in School Library Journal to illustrate the connection between school librarians and student achievement. The study published uses data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and found that “students in states that lost librarians tended to have lower reading scores—or had a slower rise on standardized tests—than those in states that gained librarians” (2011, p. 28). Data showed that states that gained librarians from 2005/2006 to the 2008/2009 school year showed significant improvement in reading scores than states that lost librarians. According to Lance & Hofschire, states with an increase in the number of employed school librarians raised test scores by 2.2% (2011, p. 28). Barbara Stripling, Director of Library Services for New York City, has stated that “although some principals still recognize the value of highly qualified librarians in these tough economic times, many more have no qualms about getting rid of them” (Lance & Hofschire, 2011, p. 30).

Research has found that there is a positive and significant relationship between higher reading levels and the presence of a certified librarian in the school. A study by Lance, Wellborn, and Hamilton-Pennell in 1993, known as the Colorado Study, was the first of more than twenty-five studies which sought to examine the relationship between
“elements of school libraries, student access to certified school librarians, and the strength and quality of school library programs and their impact on student achievement test scores” (AASL National Research Forum, p. 7). Schools without a certified school librarian will inevitably have students with gaps in literacy and the critical evaluation of technology. In *The Evidence-Based Manifesto for School Librarians*, Todd describes evidence-based school librarianship as “an approach that systematically engages research-driven evidence, school librarian-observed evidence, and user-reported evidence in the ongoing processes of decision making, development, and continuous improvement to achieve the school’s mission and goals….which typically center on student achievement and quality teaching and learning” (Todd, 2008, para. 2). School libraries are critical to student achievement and highlighting the evidentiary and intrinsic link between having a certified school librarian and student achievement illustrates value.

Designing formal goals to determine the needs of students not only helps identify points of need, but can illustrate the value of the school library program run by a certified librarian on student success. School libraries are particularly important to underserved populations who might otherwise lack access to technology and reading materials at home. Often the school library provides the only access that students have to technology and materials, valuable instruction, and readers’ advisory. Other students that are particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of not having a school librarian include English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities (Lance & Hofschire, 2011). For many, the expectation is that public libraries will fill in the gaps and provide students with what they need outside of the school. School librarians help
serve the individual needs of students and have an increase in success—even as budgets are dwindling (Lance & Hofschire, 2012). The diverse body of theoretical and empirical knowledge that defines school librarianship allows the profession to grow and transform in order to meet the needs of students and teachers (Todd, 2008). School libraries have the ability to use professional experience in order to reach all students and to have an impact on their cultural, intellectual, and cultural development.

The balance of evidence-based practice in libraries shifts from a focus on inputs to outputs. With a framework created by the AASL in *Standards for the 21st Century Learner* the evidence that should be generated that specifically focus on outcomes and exemplify student learning and inquiry, critical thinking, developing knowledge-based competencies, and learning to evaluate and use information (AASL, 2007). Evidence-based practice allows the school librarian to be an important instructional partner. When librarians employ evidence-based practice, they are combining their knowledge of stakeholders’ needs, the mission and goals of the school, and their professional experience and expertise to the benefit of the student. School librarians need to move away from more traditional methods of collecting data such as observations, collection age, and circulation statistics and “merge theory and practice” through the use of evidence-based practice (Richey & Cahill, 2015, p.1). Traditional data simply does not provide enough information about the library or the librarian’s contribution to student learning. A focus on desired learning outcomes should be the focus of collecting evidence. Indirect measures such as usage statistics, circulation, and number of collaboration are useful, but they fail to show the full impact and value of the school library (Todd, 2007). Tools used in evidence-based practice allow teachers to
evaluate student work as well as provide students with opportunities to self-evaluate. According to Harada & Yoshina, these tools might include entrance or exit slips, graphic organizers, portfolios, or rubrics (2010). Collecting and disseminating evidence results in improved stakeholder and administrative support and informed instruction. Evidence-based practice empowers librarians to assess, create, and develop “cyclical and systematic data that documents student needs” (Richey & Cahill, 2015, Abstract). According to the survey discussed in the article, What’s a School Librarian’s Favorite Preposition? Evidence In, Of, and For Practice, Richey and Cahill state that there is minimal research determining the extent to which school librarians implement evidence-based practice (2015). According to the American Association of School Librarians, the “mission of the school library program is to ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information. The school librarian empowers students to be critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information” (AASL, 2009, “Mission”).

According to Ross Todd, director of Rutgers University’s Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL), evidence-based school scholarship “is an approach that systematically engages research-derived evidence, school librarian-observed evidence, and user-reported evidence in the ongoing processes of decision making, development, and continuous improvement to achieve the school’s mission and goals. These goals typically center on student achievement and quality teaching and learning” (Todd, 2008, para. 2). Carol Gordon states the School Libraries chapter in Being Evidence Based in Library and Information Practice that evidence entails taking stock of students’ work and instruction should be the result of feedback and that
learning outcomes should be the measure of library effectiveness (Gordon, 2016, p. 136).

Effectively utilizing and disseminating research through the use of evidence-based learning and teaching practices offers a practical avenue to improve school library programming and services. Evidence-based practice offers school librarians a cyclical and systematic process for collecting meaningful data that documents and, ultimately, improves student outcomes. Evidence-based practice can act as a tool to facilitate structured program growth, generate evidence that contributes to student learning, and make the school library essential to the academic development of students (Todd, 2008). When school librarians merge research with the standards set by the State and guidelines presented by the AASL, librarians are better able to articulate and create a needs based library program.

**Research Design**

Research was done to further understand the extent to which school librarians implement evidence-based practice as a tool for creating library programs. Resources and tools to support school librarians’ understanding of evidence-based practice are available, however, a deeper understanding regarding the how and why is more elusive. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to more fully understand the methods, innovations, and ideas that school librarians have for implementing evidence-based practices which lead to a strong school library programs. Research questions focused on the collection and use of evidence-based practice by school librarians and the implications that data had on programming, perceived value, and stakeholder support. Interviews also sought to discover effective methods for maintaining or increasing
support for the school library media program. Interviews of selected school librarians in North Carolina illuminated the use of evidence-based practice as a process to strengthen and preserve the profession and maintain a crucial aspect of quality education.

Sample

The population of interest were school librarians currently teaching in grades K-12 in a school district ranking in the top 20 largest school districts in the southeastern Unites States (AS&U, 2014). Over one hundred elementary, middle, and high schools were part of the original study population. However, in order to further narrow the sample and more fully study this specific population, purposive sampling was used based upon the expertise and recommendations of Dr. Sandra Hughes-Hassell, Professor, UNC-Chapel Hill School of Information and Library Science and Kendra Allen, County Library Media Coordinating Teacher for Secondary Schools. Sampling was conducted with permission from the UNC Chapel Hill and Wake County Public School Internal Review Board (IRB). Non-probability selective sampling technique drawn on theory and practice was used to determine participants for the study. The population was further narrowed with three additional criteria for inclusion in the study: employment in a specified county and establishment of a ‘quality’ school library program as defined below, and have worked at either more than one school or under more than one principal. Veteran and newer librarian interviews compliment one another and provided a more holistic view of practices in the school library world.

Participants must have worked as certified school librarians in a public school in a specified county in North Carolina. The American Academy of School Librarians
(AASL) establishes guidelines to shape and guide school library programs with a focus on “building a flexible learning environment with the goal of producing successful learners skilled in multiple literacies” (Empowering Learners, 2009, p. 5). Professional standards for school librarians exist synchronously with a ‘quality’ or ‘exemplary’ school library program. According to the AASL, an “exemplary school library meets all of the guidelines areas” qualified in Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs (AASL, Outline of Guidelines). According to the AASL, developing visions for learning, teaching for learning, building the learning environment, and learning through leadership are all paramount to ensuring that school library programs are succeeding in their mission to students and educators (Empowering Learners, 2009). Exemplary school library programs adhere to expectations established by the AASL and evaluation instruments and standards illustrated in the North Carolina School Media Coordinator Standards. The changing role of librarians in the 21st century demands that librarians remain current and strive to develop methods for creating school library programs centered around achieving student success both in and out of the classroom. According to the AASL, building support from administrators and stakeholders can have an impact on the quality of the school library program (Empowering Learners, 2009).

Recruitment. Once eligible librarians were identified, they were invited to participate in the study via an emailed recruitment letter (see Appendix B). The email for potential candidates included general research information about the study as well as anonymization and privacy.

Data Collection Methods. Eight school librarians were interviewed: two elementary, three middle, and three high school. Interviews lasted approximately forty-
five minutes and focused on answering questions related evidence-based practice in relation to programs, teaching, and advocacy efforts. A guide with prepared questions provided structure to the interviews and was useful in assessing the experiences and methods of school librarians (see Appendix A). Face to face interviews took place in school libraries and both audio recording and note taking using a laptop were utilized during the interview. Having both an audio recording and notes made it easier to fill in the gaps and collect higher quality data.

**Data Analysis**

This study utilized a conventional qualitative content analysis and combined coding with the flexibility of in-depth semi-structured interviews for a methodical exploration of themes and ideas. Patterns and themes that arose both from information gleaned from the literature review and the interviews themselves were analyzed. A transcript was prepared from the interviews and labeled with tags as various themes became apparent. A metadata log was prepared and text was sorted with coded information distilled from semi structured interviews with librarians. A codebook was created to analyze and ultimately develop meaning from the data. The compilation of blocks of text from different sources was then sorted into a single block. After identifying themes that emerged from the text, a code book was created. Unique identifiers were used in conjunction with the data classification template to accurately code the interviews. The coding scheme was refined continually as common and reoccurring themes emerged from the text.

One objective of the interviews was to discover more about how individual librarians define the term data. Librarians utilized a variety of methods of data collection
including formal assessments such as surveys and informal assessments including conversations with patrons. Librarians often mentioned casual conversations including “feedback and suggestions” with students and teachers when specifically asked what types of data they collect (Interviews, L1). However, for the purpose of this study, data collected in casual conversations will not qualify as ‘data’ because it is not quantifiable and was not recorded or logged. ‘Data’ was not a predefined variable in the interview questions, however, for the purpose of this study and in order to qualify as ‘data,’ information will be defined as quantifiable or measurable and recorded. The goal of leaving the term ‘data’ as an open term was to avoid conjecture or the presumption that all librarians would define the term with the same meaning. Although there is little doubt that relevant conversations with students and teachers leads to a better library, this research study will only focus on the measurable aspects of data collected and utilized by school librarians.

Findings

All eight librarians mentioned collecting some sort of data to inform their library practice. Although the definition of data was not specifically defined in the interview questions, it became clear that librarians consider data to be quantifiable, measurable information collected to benefit library practice. The librarians that participated in the interviews all used some aspect of evidence-based practice in their library. One elementary school librarian said, “I was surprised when I first started that (data) wasn’t used more” throughout school library practice. She stated that collecting and using data gives her the “confidence to make decisions” about library programs, materials, and ways to best support the curriculum (Interviews, L5). Another librarian stated that they
haven’t been “really good” about implementing evidence-based practice, but stated that they recognize the importance of using it to assess students’ understanding and to see “what changes to make for next time” (Interviews, L1). One librarian mentioned that they collect data in order to ensure that the library has materials that support both the curriculum and student pleasure reading (Interviews, L4). According to librarians, “tracking data and using evaluation instruments...impacts what’s happening” in the library as the librarian works to support students, collaborate with teachers, and support the curriculum (Interviews, L3).

Defining Data

The school librarians interviewed used a variety of tools to formally and informally collect data including entrance and exit tickets, student and teacher surveys, student input using sticky notes, rubrics, and Destiny, the county-wide library software. All of the librarians mentioned Follett’s Destiny software as being essential to their evidence based practice. The catalog can be accessed by students and parents from home or on an app and the data available is accessible to administrators and librarians. Destiny was mentioned as being a source for data about circulation and the collection and allows librarians to run reports and statistics that apprise instruction and materials. According to Follett Online, the software provides “timely, actionable data” which might be interpreted as data that helps determine future actions (Follett Online, 2017). One elementary school librarian mentioned that using Destiny has “been a discovery over the years” which provides the confidence to order materials and know what is happening within the library (Interviews, L5). Another mentioned, “our online catalog system gives us so much data and information!” (Interviews, L2). Librarians found that
the software provides useful circulation usage, inventory statistics, and reports. Another librarian stated that they “would like to explore Destiny” in order to more fully understand its capabilities (Interviews, L6).

Used county-wide, Destiny software allows librarians to create resource lists and share data. According to the Follett website, “Destiny supports open standards for easy and integrated data sharing” (Library Management System, 2017). Librarians mentioned the data that they collected, however no one mentioned anything beyond circulation statistics and basic collection development information. While the Follett website indicates that Destiny is a tool for collecting data, it appears that librarians use the software to capture basic data. More research needs to be done to understand how librarians are using this particular tool and the extent to which they understand its capabilities.

Librarians work in conjunction with classroom teachers to make sure that students “get what they need” (Interviews, L4). One school librarian felt that “entrance and exit tickets are really great” and then went on to describe using them in the library to ensure that students needs are being met (Interviews, L4). They remarked that they do “exit tickets about your greatest success today and what are you still confused on?” which allowed the librarian to modify instruction “on what they needed” (Interviews, L4). “Entrance tickets were good because it allows them to reflect...then the teacher and I are able to help them get what they need” (Interviews, L4).

Another evaluative tool used throughout the county is the Digital Learning and Media Inventory (DLMl) which replaced the Annual Media and Technology Report in 2016. This required document is completed annually by all school librarians district-wide
and is designed to be shared with administrators and other county-wide leadership. Librarians mentioned that it asks for data including “numbers of weeded books, circulation totals, and the average age of the collection” although one librarian remarked that “some of it wasn’t very helpful or didn’t apply to me much at all” (Interviews, L6). The county website describes the purpose of the DLMI Digital Learning and Media Inventory as a way to collect data for state as well as national reporting and to help inform budgets and planning (NC DLMI Reporting Tool, 2016). Although descriptions of the Annual Media and Technology Report seems to describe more of a technology inventory or an audit. As of April, 2016 the county reported plans to create a new tool that will provide data and customizable reports and complement the Digital Learning Progress Rubric. The county website states that the rubric assists schools in the transition to a focus on 21st century learning. Surveys of technology including teacher and classroom needs and wants help determine needs and wants in relation to the “media staff, book collection, etc. Data has driven some decisions to refresh the CTE labs and we were able to know what to do with them. We needed to know who wanted them and looked at results from a survey.” (Interviews, L8). Overall, the tool seems to be most useful for determining technology statistics within the school.

School librarians are pragmatic in the types of data that they collect. They use a variety of tools to conduct needs based assessments in order to identify and prioritize curricular, student, and staff needs. Budget cuts, staff reductions, and limited time force librarians to be very selective about the types of data they collect and what they choose to do with it. Librarian 4 remarked that “being flexible and knowing that you can’t do it
all” is essential to school librarianship (Interviews). Data collection governs programs, collection development, and advocacy.

One librarian questioned the term ‘evidence-based practice’ in relation to what school librarians are actually doing (Interviews, L8). This librarian cited the fact that what school libraries do is similar, but not the same as what one might see “in the health sciences” (Interviews, L8). They remarked that there is “no peer review or double blind study” and that “those things are harder to achieve in education” (Interviews, L8). They went on to say, “things like circulation, door count, how many classes we hold...that's not evidence-based” (Interviews, L8). Evidence-based practice is a way to “think about new ways of doing things” and “I would like to learn more about how to do that in the library” and “I like the idea of thinking about new ways of doing things” (Interviews, L8). Violet H. Harada writes in *Building Evidence Folders for Learning Through Libraries* that librarians who are comfortable with “traditional forms of reporting” must make a switch from an “object-oriented approach to a student-oriented approach to assessment and evaluation (Harada, p.1). She writes that, “the object-oriented approach centers on evaluation reports that include statistical counting of “things” such as new acquisitions, circulation figures, and numbers of instructional sessions and planning meetings” and “focuses on assessment of student performance” (Harada, “Building Evidence Folders,” p.1). A seasoned librarian with experience in multiple settings remarked that having evidence-based practice being “thrown around in education…. makes the hair stand up on the back of my neck” (Interviews, L8).

**Programs and Materials**
A keystone to the school library program is the mission statement. This guiding document is the reduction of the values, goals, and direction of the school library program. Seven out of the eight librarians have an official mission statement in place. Five libraries have a mission statement unique to the library and two libraries have chosen to relate the library mission to that of the school. “When I first started, I had one but I decided that the school’s mission was going to be most important. My mission is a part of this school” (Interviews, L5). For a librarian that does not have a mission statement, they said, “I’m not saying that I don’t think I need one. It just hasn’t been something that I’ve been able to do in the short amount of time since I’ve been here. I feel bad saying that I don’t have anything, but this year was crazy because it was my first year back. Survival seems to be most important” (Interviews, L8). The county requires all employees to create goals at the beginning of the school year. For many librarians, these goals help inform practice and provide a structure for developing programs.

**Materials and Instruction**

The interviews revealed that librarians are focused on providing instruction, learning outcomes, and resources for students in order to develop into 21st century learners (AASL, Empowering Learners). The county where this research took place is geographically large and encompasses both city and rural areas. Although librarians serve students from a variety of backgrounds including race and socioeconomic status, the priority was creating lifelong learners through engaging learning experiences and materials. All eight of the librarians interviewed expressed that they wanted to make sure they were serving the students in the school community. One librarian remarked
that they collect data “to make sure that we’re meeting the needs of students...and where we’re not” (Interviews, L7). Data collection allows librarians to reflect on lessons and understand more regarding how they can better serve their stakeholders. An elementary school librarian remarked the library is “on a fixed schedule, so I do the same lessons and pay attention to the reaction of the students and their attentiveness. That helps me to change things up. I might add movement or sometimes a video element. In my planning book, I make notes” (Interviews, L6). Student-first culture is the primary focus of school librarians; the “number one thing for each day is getting through what’s walking through the door (Interviews, L4). One librarian remarked, “maybe the shelves aren’t perfect and my desk is a mess, but my attention goes to the kids” (Interviews, L6).

Having the materials that students need for recreational reading is also informed by the collection of data. Librarians utilize surveys, professional materials, focus groups, and suggestion boxes to more fully be aware of what students want to read recreationally. An essential aspect of meeting student recreational and curricular reading needs is “making sure that across the collection, we have materials that are part of the curriculum” (Interviews, L4). Collecting data also informs library policy for many of the school librarians. For instance, one library chose to do away with “overdue fines and... restrictions” (Interviews, L3). Another librarian indicated that student media assistants provide honest feedback “about what students want. We try to do engaging things with the students, what they want, what books they’re reading, how they get their books and what they’re reading” (Interviews, L8). For one high school library, they “start
with freshman orientation and work to have a good rapport with students” (Interviews, L8).

Data collection apprises collection development including acquisitions and weeding. One librarian liked that data can be used to “target the collection” and after weeding, they “did a book drive based on data” (Interviews, L6). Another librarian remarked that they have spent this school year tracking data about their collection including “looking at the average age of (the) collection.” This particular school weeded over 2,000 books and was able to achieve stakeholder support because the PTA president was at meetings and saw the data that the librarian had collected (Interview, L5).

The school librarians that were interviewed also emphasized a participatory culture where all voices are heard and have value. It was repeated by every librarian interviewed that having an “open and welcoming” library which was predicated on creating quality relationships with both teachers and students and the “way you feel about your program is contagious” (Interviews, L1). And, “success comes with relationships and collaboration. A strong program has to involve everybody in your school” (Interviews, L1). A librarian remarked that “I work to create a student/teacher driven program. Both programs and resources are available based on their needs (Interviews, L1). The media center at one school was renamed the ‘Learning Commons’ in order for students to feel that the library is “theirs” and that it’s a place for everyone to be—and for everyone to be learning (Interviews, L4). Developing relationships seems to be a common way for librarians to gather data about the needs of students and faculty. The focus for school libraries is on “what students want and need. They come here and
we help them achieve that. In the past, few classes came here and teachers used the library much like a computer lab—it was basically just for tech” (Interviews, L3).

For all of the librarians interviewed, seeing the library as central to the school curriculum and culture was key. In order to accommodate kids from different backgrounds, “we differentiate instruction” and emphasize “ease of communication” (Interviews, L8). Librarian 1 stated, “media specialists are able to bring the school big picture to the table” (Interviews, L1). And all librarians agreed that the school library is critical to student achievement and should be the hub of the school. In order to more fully understand the needs of students in relation to the curriculum, “evidence just goes back to the conversations with the teachers” (Interviews, L4). One librarian articulated that the “atmosphere is student centered. We work and flow within and around it; it belongs to the...community (Interviews, L3) with a focus on “equitable learning experiences” (Interviews, L4). One high school librarian articulated that they have “tried not to be keepers, rather givers of stuff” (Interviews, L3). The school librarians interviewed have adopted strategic approaches to assessing programs, lessons, and materials. As librarians collect evidence and reflect on learning outcomes, they are able to enhance instruction and positively influence student and staff experiences. Student centered programs allow “kids to.... map out their own learning. More successful when they can create their own topics and I can foster that. Something that I’ve really tried to do ...doesn’t have to always be a whole class experience. I can impact small groups, individuals...If you don’t have to do a whole class experience. It’s powerful to get kids excited” (Interviews, L5).

**Advocacy**
Librarians were able to articulate the importance of collecting and disseminating data as an indispensable aspect of advocacy. Showing that “libraries are still relevant and that the information that I share with students is important. Just because they can get the information from anywhere doesn’t mean that there isn’t meaning in the library” (Interviews, L6). One librarian explained an incident in which data became a “powerful advocacy tool:”

“We had a new principal and she didn’t know how busy we were in the morning block. I was asked to take on a morning duty. I was able to show that we had over 80 visitors during that (morning) time. The data really showed that was my time for readers’ advisory. MTAC committee met last month and we’ve seen a huge drop in that morning time when I was gone.” (Interviews, L5)

One of the high school librarians mentioned that using data provides them with “evidence that they can’t ignore” (Interviews, L2). Data is also used by school librarians “as part of presenting” and it is a “powerful advocacy tool” (Interviews, L5). It is essential for school librarians to collect data because “people, especially administration, want to see the numbers behind things” (Interviews, L5). Another librarian stated that it is “essential for librarians to advocate for your program through the lens for the overall school goals...and involve what you’re doing through the vision of the entire school” (Interviews, L4). For one librarian, the “biggest measure is total circulation, but circulation has dropped off in the past few years” (Interviews, L5). They went on to highlight that the “role of the school librarian is multifaceted with a wide array of responsibilities” (Interviews, L5). A difficulty that one librarian remarked upon is that, “people don’t always see what I’m doing. I call it the iceberg theory. You don’t see all of the other things that happen out of sight” (Interviews, L6). Ensuring that stakeholders are aware of the responsibilities of the librarian is further defended by applied data.
Advocacy can take many forms including “increasing support by bringing ideas back from conferences, developing relationships with the PTSA, creating and expanding programs...writing grants” (Interviews, L1). The “more outreach you do, the better support you’ll get through the community” (Interviews, L1). Librarians discussed making big changes to the library and incorporating documentation “in writing what…(we) wanted to do. Sharing the data and documents with administration justified the funding. We relied on opened communication and showed dedication” (Interviews, L2/L3). One librarian remarked that “it doesn’t matter what is best practice, if the administration doesn’t support you, it’s really hard” (Interviews, L2). One librarian regards what will make the administrator’s “life easier” and cater to that when advocating for library programs or funding” (Interviews, L7). Librarians also have to “advocate for funding-and that’s tough” (Interviews, L5). A librarian wisely mentioned that “it’s important to know the communication style of your administrator” and using an evaluation tool can “give administrators a sense of what all is in the job (Interviews, L6). Another tool for advocacy with administration is the librarian’s “evaluation tool (which) gives administrators a sense of what all is in this job” (Interviews, L6).

Advocacy can also be accomplished through collaboration with stakeholders including teachers, parents, and members of the community. A librarian described advocating for a flexible schedule and that it was “a tough sell” but “I found a few teachers that would be open to coming into the library and working together. We designed the lessons together and it honestly just sold itself” (Interviews, L5). When working with teachers, “you have to find something that is valuable that you can add. Prove your worth! You can offer to teach content, make teachers lives easier, help
grade, and marry whatever you’re doing with their content” (Interviews, L6). An elementary school librarian stated, “I work in a completely open facility, so parents and teachers would see everything that was happening and want to join” (Interviews, L5). Multiple librarians mentioned that they did as much as they could to “take the load off of classroom teachers” (Interviews, L5). One librarian stated, “I honestly feel like the very best tool that you can have is a warm inviting space and attitude. We do have the PTSA come and they host lunch for us. They have a lot of ideas and ways that you can work with people. We have student projects, murals, everybody using your space and feeling welcome to use it. And to feel like parents will come in, they feel like they can ask you a question” (Interviews, L8).

**Challenges**

Public school budgets have become smaller in recent years and with it, cuts to library programs, materials, and staffing. Reductions in budget have equated to reductions in staffing at many of the schools in this large county. One librarian remarked that they “had a staff of three and a reduction in staffing has led to having to change the schedule” (Interviews, L5). School librarians express learning to make do, and collaborating in order to secure the continuation of programs. One elementary school librarian remarked that they would like to do more evidence-based practice, but that a lack of staff prevented it (Interviews, L5). According to interviewees, reductions in staffing are the result of policies set in place by the Department of Public Instruction and that there is a direct correlation between numbers of students and staff. One elementary school librarian said that although they have been able to manage, it was “hard to lose staffing and we had to go to a combination fixed/flexible schedule. It has given us
perspective as to what works and what doesn’t” but the greatest challenge comes in maintaining quality programming (Interviews, L5). A solution to the reduction in staffing has been to create a volunteer corp. And although one librarian remarked that they “have great volunteers,” they also feel that they are “constantly trying to train people how to do things” (Interviews, L6). One librarian remarked that “you might not have an assistant or a budget, but you need to be flexible and make do” (Interviews, L6).

Although research has shown that school librarians are a boon to schools and students, one librarian worried that “you’re always at risk to be dropped if there’s a family illness or travel. I don’t always feel like I’m doing the best for my students” (Interviews, L6).

Another “challenge can be that policies of a school or culture can impede your original vision” (Interviews, L2). Advocacy can help mitigate and help administration more fully understand the role of the library in the school culture and for student achievement. “Principals are put in a tough spot...and not given the budget” The struggle between having a fixed and flexible schedule puts “principals in a tough spot....they are not given the budget” to find adequate time for teacher planning and librarians who are advocating for flexible access. One librarian remarked that “they’re two evaluation instruments that don’t match” (Interviews, L5). Multiple librarians remarked that “time is a big challenge” (Interviews, L2/L3). Programs are often affected by the number of responsibilities that school librarians are given, “school librarians have had more and more added to their plates and things that don’t necessary benefit students. We might have afternoon duty, before school, or using our time in ways that aren’t benefitting the students. Then people are so overwhelmed that they can’t focus on the program” (Interviews, L7). The AASL encourages school librarians to collaborate
with classroom teachers in order to improve student outcomes, however this can present challenges. “One thing that I struggle with is working collaboratively with resistant teachers. I’m done watering the rocks” (Interviews, L7).

Technology also presents a unique challenge to school librarians. In recent years, school librarians have become increasingly responsible for repairing and maintaining technology. “Keeping up with the pace” of technology and software is a challenge (Interviews, L1). One librarian remarked, “I’m also the tech contact, so I have to manage all of the inventory for all of that. There was tech issue after tech issue. By the end of the year, I know it had taken a hit—especially in my PBL” (Interviews, L5). It was necessary, but then again. We do a disservice by not having an ITS at each school. They remarked that it was necessary and they “tried to look at it as a learning growth- it created an extra value...and makes me valuable to the school. I’ll take it on, but something has to be sacrificed” (Interviews, L5). Another librarian remarked that there are two challenges have been consistent throughout their time as a school librarian: keeping up and dealing with all of the technology. They said, “it’s not part of the media program that I fix computers” (Interviews, L7). Librarians interviewed reiterated that technology “takes away from the media program” and that can be “very frustrating” (Interviews, L7). Another librarian remarked that they were “used to having techs do that (repair) work for me. It’s not a large part of the program of learning that as well” (Interviews, L8).

**Professional Development**

All but one librarian is National Board Certified. The librarians that participate in the program remarked that it provides them with opportunities for self reflection and
forces you to “always look back on what you’ve done” (Interviews, L4). National Board Certification “gives me credibility” (Interviews, L8). In addition to being National Board Certified, all of the librarians found that having a “PLT is an enormous help” that can “provide support” (Interviews, L2, L7). “Having a good, honest PLT can be really helpful” (Interviews, L1, L3). Librarians “need outside conversations; a need a network of people that remind you of what your goals are” and provide you with someone to “bounce ideas off of” (Interviews, L3, L7). Another librarian stated that, my “PLT is something that is so foundational to what I do and what I am here” (Interviews, L4). PLTs “create richer, more effective and meaningful programs for students” (Interviews, L5). “My PLT and I have been together for 10 years. And they make me a better librarian. I feel motivated and obligated to step up my game” (Interviews, L7). One librarian believes that because this is “such a large district…. you can ask so many other librarians” (Interviews, L8).

According to Richey and Cahill, applying evidence-based practice “requires strategic planning” and is cyclical (2014, p.2). Full participation in evidence-based practice entails sharing data with stakeholders. These stakeholders could be students, teachers, parents, administration, or peers. The librarians interviewed mentioned sharing data with stakeholders as being primarily for one of two reasons: either advocating for something or proving the value or usefulness of a particular program. One thing that all participants mentioned is that data is a fundamental aspect of proving the value of the school library program. The types and the uses of the data collected vary widely from librarian to librarian and school to school. “Constantly advocating” (Interviews, L6).
Participants expressed an interest in implementing more evidence-based data collections into their professional practices however, there seems to be reluctance among librarians to share the data that they are collecting (Interviews). Librarian 6 mentioned that sharing data “is a growth area for me” and went on to say “but I can’t imagine what people would care about. Some of my colleagues do action research…. I’ve shared at Convergence, but I don’t think that’s really sharing data” (Interviews, L6). Most librarians mentioned the countywide symposium for school library media and information technology specialists as being a place where they share and receive data and new ideas. One high school librarian remarked, “I don’t share (data) outside of the school. I like it when people share their successes but it’s hard to do that without sounding like bragging. We should share it more; we tend to gather data about our end” (Interviews, L8).

**Implications & Creating a Sustainable Model**

In an increasingly complex world distinguished by a growing number of materials and progressively more digital access, school librarianship is driven by questions of documentation, information, and value. Interviews with school librarians illustrated the essential role of libraries as a central part of the school community and the role of librarian as instructional partner and student advocate. Also, interviews spotlight the collection and use of data by all of the school librarians, however they appear to focus on fundamental and pragmatic information. Although a number of the librarians interviewed participate in PLTs, county wide conferences, and have regular interactions with stakeholders, data suggests that librarians do not regard what they are collecting as worth disseminating. This leads to the implication that school librarians are
comfortable with and have time for what Violet Harada calls "traditional forms of reporting" that focus on the statistical counting of things (Harada) rather than a deeper practice of research. The majority of librarians expressed a desire to utilize evidence-based practice to inform library practice and instruction, but matters of time and limited staffing often inhibit their ability to submerge themselves in research. In *The Evidence-Based Manifesto for School Librarians*, Ross Todd states that there’s a sense that research is not consulted because it doesn’t “address the real-world concerns of practicing librarians” (Todd, 2008). Primary questions that result from these interviews are how to embolden school librarians to utilize evidence-based practice on a regular basis and what, if any, modifications of professional support need to take place.

Professional development for school librarians should include evidence-based practice as it demonstrates the connection between school librarians and learning outcomes (Todd, 2008). Continuing professional development is necessary to help librarians become more comfortable with the notion of collecting and sharing data with one another. Seven of the eight participating librarians are part of a regular professional PLT which supplies new ideas and perspectives. This can inform practice and add value to the library program. It’s also an ideal place to implement sharing evidence, or data. In order to develop a community of librarians that are collecting and disseminating data, it is essential to make a switch from an “object-oriented approach to a student-oriented approach to assessment and evaluation (Harada, “Building Evidence Folders,” n.d.).

Research that is being done must be applicable to one of the primary roles of the school librarian thereby insuring that the data that librarians are collecting results in more successful student outcomes and indicators of value. School librarians can also find
ways to collaborate with teachers, other school librarians, and public libraries in order to develop an interconnected and vital library consortium. Sharing materials and ideas and collaborating with other library professionals expands networks and and broadens the knowledge base.

Sustainability of time consuming data collection methods comes into question upon examination of the imbalance between the skyrocketing number of responsibilities required of a school librarian and dwindling budgets and staffing. The potential for using evidence-based practice to create meaningful programs and effective collections is enormous, but only if school librarians are given the time to accomplish this task. One recommendation includes budgeting for paraprofessionals at the elementary level rather than relying on a volunteer system. Having a parent corp is helpful, but having experienced professionals is necessary; particularly on a fixed schedule where librarians are teaching multiple classes, are responsible for technology, and must maintain library materials and collections.

Evidence-based practice would ideally become integrated into everyday library work patterns and routines. Action research promotes a systematic way to approach problem solving and developing a deeper understanding of the needs of library users. The rapidly changing nature of information and technology requires that school librarians remain current, support new technologies, and advocate for programs. Data suggests that librarians spend enormous amounts of time advocating for programs and materials. Administrators and stakeholders must have a full understanding of all that the school librarian does. One librarian mentioned the ‘iceberg effect’ during interviews and how rarely stakeholders see the big picture. More research is needed to understand the
dynamics between librarians, stakeholders, and advocacy. However, it is essential that school librarians feel comfortable with collecting and sharing data as well as communicating value and library needs to stakeholders. Finding a way to streamline data collection into everyday actionable practice seems a systematic and essential approach to successfully advocating for the school library.

Further study is needed to determine whether formalized evidence-based practice in a school library setting is possible given the use of students as subjects, staffing, budgetary, and time constraints. In recent years, there has been a push in schools towards being data driven with an emphasis on standardized testing and numbers. This leads to a consideration of whether the push for evidence-based practice in school libraries is the result of an emphasis on numbers and data or whether it has been found to actually benefit students and library media centers. Originating in the health sciences, evidence-based practice works well when contending with health-based data. Evidence-based practice as a methodology in the sciences allows researchers to find and appraise the best evidence and, ultimately, determine strategies for the most idea outcomes. Evidence-based practice in a school library should result in addressing needs and gaps in student knowledge, materials, and curriculum. Librarians that are chronically pressed for time are missing aspects of the methodology found in the health sciences such as a double blind peer reviewed study and are unable to properly and fully immerse themselves in scientifically driven evidence-based practice. The data collected during interviews further supports this concern as librarians are spending their time collecting what might, according to researchers, be considered low hanging fruit. This isn’t to say that school librarians are not engaging in collecting...
valuable information in order to develop student-centered programs, differentiated instruction, and higher level thinking skills. Rather, librarians are participating in collecting and sharing data, but it does not have the same qualities of rigorously methodical science. Library science is, at its core, a social sciences and librarians have managed to create a model for collecting data that applies to the environment where they are teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator. The ambivalence regarding whether the collection of data by school librarians should be labeled ‘evidence-based practice’ remains uncertain.

The consideration of standard methods and procedures for evidence-based practice in school libraries is not a new concern, however as libraries and the digital landscape change, librarians must demonstrate flexibility and consider the diverse needs of students. The role of school librarian is as an instructional and educational partner that creates an environment where everyone has the opportunity to be teacher, learner, contributor, and producer (ALA, 2009, p.16). The librarians interviewed demonstrate the essential nature of school librarians in supporting both recreational and instructional resources for all students, providing open access to technology, collaborating with teachers, and aligning teaching to curricular standards. The library should be a place that fosters learning and communication. Evidence-based practice helps prove value and establishes the library as the learning hub for the school community and as a center for active, flexible learning. Collecting data and deeply considering implications allows librarians to assess and adjust teaching in order to support learning and gain enthusiastic readers and users of information.
Appendix A

Interview Questions

1) How long have you been a school librarian?

2) Describe your school library media program. How has it changed over the last two years? Four years?

3) What are some of the challenges/successes that you’ve experienced during your career? 4) Describe your methods for collaborating with teachers. What are some strategies that you use to identify students' interests and unique learning styles? How do you think this adds value to the school library program?

5) How do you currently work with administration to evaluate the school library media program?

6) How do you prepare for PLT meetings with administration, particularly in regard to budget and library needs?

7) How do you insure that programs are current and meet the needs of both teachers and students? Tools?

8) In the last two years, in what ways have you made efforts to increase support for the school library media program at your school? Which of these ways was the most/least effective?

9) What have been the most effective ways that you have found to advocate for your library? With administration? With parents and teachers?

10) How have successes in advocacy changed perceptions of the school library program? For parents? For administration? For teachers?
11) Do you have a mission statement in place? How do you develop formal goals for your library practice?
12) What types of data do you typically collect? What tools do you use? Informal and formal tools to collect data? Do you disseminate information to colleagues?
13) Describe how you use evidence-based practice in your library.
14) Do you have any other questions for me? Anything additional that you would like to add?

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Dear:

Hello, my name is Erika Henderson and I am a master’s student at UNC-CH’s School of Information and Library Science. I am writing to ask if you would agree to be interviewed for my master’s thesis research project focused on developing exceptional library programs. I am hoping to interview ten librarians in Wake County.

If you agree to participate, the in-person interviews would last approximately 45 minutes. The questions will focus on:

• The role of librarian as a valuable instructional and resource partner
• Advocacy
• How the attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions of stakeholders garner or diminish support of programs
• The role of librarian as advocate for the library
All information gained during the course of the interview will be kept confidential. No libraries or librarians will be identified by name in any of the research findings. I realize that librarians are extremely busy. As a token of my appreciation for taking time out of your busy schedule to speak with me, all interview participants will receive a $20 Amazon gift card.

The interviews will be conducted this February, in your library, and at a time that would be convenient for you.

Thank you for considering participating in this research.

Erika Henderson

MSLS Candidate 2017
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Excellent Creative Business Libraries and Business Centers. Reference & User