



Doctor of Education

Sanford College of Education
Applied Doctoral Manuscript

Collaborative Partnerships with School Librarians in Fixed Rotation: A Qualitative Study

Dissertation-in-Practice Manuscript

Submitted to National University

Sanford College of Education

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

by

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San Diego, California

July 2025

Abstract

This qualitative case study explored how school librarians working within fixed schedule rotations in Texas elementary schools build and sustain collaborative partnerships with other educators. The study addressed the problem that fixed library schedules often inhibit collaboration between librarians and classroom teachers, limiting the development of a collaborative school culture. Grounded in standards from the American Association of School Libraries (AASL), the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), and the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the study aimed to identify strategies and interventions that enhance collaboration despite these constraints. The study focused on 14 TEA-certified school librarians with master's degrees in library and information science working in a large metropolitan area. Data collection included interviews, focus groups, and artifact analysis, such as lesson and collaboration plans. Interviews were conducted using Riverside.FM. A hybrid analysis process combined Delve software with manual methods like printed transcripts and researcher note cards for thematic coding. Findings revealed that while fixed scheduling presents substantial barriers to collaboration, such as a lack of shared planning time and isolation from classroom instruction, librarians still find meaningful ways to collaborate. These include informal communication, partnerships with ancillary educators, and asynchronous instructional tools. These practices show that collaboration is possible, even when institutional scheduling structures are rigid. The study offers several implications for practice. School leaders should intentionally support librarians as instructional partners by including them in planning and professional learning opportunities to help teachers better understand how librarians support instruction and curriculum. Future researchers can build on this study by expanding stakeholder perspectives, comparing scheduling models, and examining the relationship between collaboration and student outcomes.

Acknowledgements

Thank you, Greg, for driving me across Texas while I did my homework. I could not be a lifelong learner without you and your support. You're the best, and I love you very much.

Thank you, Wendy, for saying, "You could have gotten a doctorate," after I finished my second master's degree. It was very inspirational. I love you.

Thank you, Mom and Dad, for showing us that there is no time limit on education. You are great examples. I love you.

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Section 1: Foundation

The American Association of School Libraries (AASL) recommends that every school have a library staffed with a qualified school librarian with a master's degree from an accredited school of library and information science (2018). Texas has legislated the requirements for a school librarian as one who has completed a state-approved school librarian preparation program, completed the examination based on the state standards, holds a master's degree from an accredited institution of higher education and has two creditable years of teaching experience as a classroom teacher (Requirements for the Issuance of the Standard School Librarian Certificate, 2009). The librarian should be on a flexible schedule to provide as-needed information literacy instruction and collaborate with classroom teachers to build units of instruction and help build curriculum (Sturge, 2019). The Texas Education Agency and the Texas State Library and Archives Commission published updated guidelines in 2017 for school libraries. They recommend one Texas state-certified professional librarian per school building. Depending upon the school's average daily attendance (ADA), TEA and TSLAC recommend one or more paraprofessionals, but never fewer than a half-time person per school.

During coursework for a master's degree in library and information science, preservice librarians learn to keep the school library relevant to teachers and administrators. School librarians form collaborative relationships vertically and horizontally across the grade levels. The American Association of School Libraries (AASL) reformulated the library standards by placing greater emphasis on professional collaboration (AASL, 2018). School librarians expect to collaborate with teachers to provide instruction on library print and electronic resources and to weave information literacy and educational technology into inquiry or curriculum units (Little, 2022; Saunders & Corning, 2020).

The school librarian works across the curriculum and content areas, bringing information literacy to students and teachers. Information literacy includes digital literacy, digital citizenship, data literacy, and technology literacy. Students learn to analyze sources of information, interpret their meaning, and build an understanding of communication skills that reach beyond the elementary school building (Fontichiaro & Johnston, 2020). The AASL standards (2018) emphasized the importance of students recognizing the difference between concepts and topics. The application of concepts across the curriculum allows students to understand the perspective of different viewpoints and to become critical thinkers and researchers.

Spiering and Lechtenberg (2020) likened school librarians to a filter that can collect meaningful print and electronic materials and technology applications. School librarians collaborate with teachers when curating materials to create conceptual connections with research units and personal inquiry (Fitzgerald & Garrison, 2021). A positive correlation exists between student reading scores and schools that have fully staffed libraries (Keeling, 2023; Merga, 2022; Wine, 2023). Most principals and administrators will not argue about the importance of having a school library.

A study by Fontichiaro and Johnston (2020) found that few teachers knew school librarians were meant to collaborate and share fundamental skills through shared teaching experiences. Loh et al. (2021) interviewed teachers and administrators to gauge their understanding of the librarian's role in reading and information literacy. Although they acknowledge a librarian's importance to the school, stakeholders did not fully understand how to utilize this creative resource on campus. Librarians must market themselves as experts in information, inquiry, research, and curriculum building (Coleman, 2020) to become collaborative partners. Kachel (2019) said that with determination and intent, a collaborative culture will grow

in a school, and teachers will begin to understand that librarians are experts in information literacy and partners in the learning opportunities of their shared students.

Statement of the Problem

The problem this study addressed was that fixed library schedules inhibit collaborative partnerships between school librarians and classroom teachers and the creation of a collaborative culture within a school. The AASL's National School Library Standards and the shared foundation of Collaborate give the school librarian the responsibility "to establish and shape a culture of collaboration in the school community" (Coleman, 2020, xvi). School librarians contribute to student success, especially if there is a culture of collaboration between the librarian and classroom teachers (Merga et al., 2021). Golden (2020) found that teachers felt that the library positively impacts student research but were reluctant to collaborate with the librarian. Teachers reported time constraints, students finding the library intimidating, database confusion, and not knowing how the librarian can help. Another barrier is a lack of school administration support, time, and scheduling difficulties because of inflexible schedules (Lewis, 2021). Without a culture of collaboration on campus, school librarians lose the opportunity to demonstrate the added benefit of having a trained professional on staff to imbue information literacy into daily instruction.

Principals and teachers are often unaware of what a school library and certified librarian offers students beyond building and maintaining a diverse collection of books (Borden, 2023; Loh et al., 2021). Collaborating builds relationships (Merga et al., 2021) and leadership skills (Childs, 2023), two crucial elements to raising the esteem of the library. School librarians who raise the visibility and prominence of successful partnerships help shift budgets that buy books or preserve their positions during lean budgetary years (Ahlfeld, 2019). If librarians do not make

themselves indispensable, administrators may eliminate budgets, programming, or the library itself.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how librarians build a culture of collaboration with other educators while in the ancillary rotation. The aim was to identify effective strategies, interventions, and recommendations to facilitate and enhance collaboration in educational settings. Kammer et al. (2021) explained that collaboration improves student learning outcomes by elevating student engagement. Planning time with classroom teachers can prove difficult while the school librarian is on a fixed schedule rotation.

Adair et al. (2023) pointed out that although library graduate programs emphasize collaboration and team teaching, school librarians enter the field with little practice and experience. If a school does not already have an established culture of collaboration, the librarian new to the field may not have the experience needed to establish professional relationships. School librarians need time and adaptability to hone collaboration skills; time is in short supply while in the rotation. Although the literature reviewed finds collaboration essential to the school library's success, it does not mention how librarians in the rotation can achieve this critical competency.

This researcher intended to find out how school librarians with a fixed schedule envision collaboration with other educators by interviewing elementary school librarians across districts in an urban county in Texas. The county had 20 school districts with 600 elementary schools combined. Six districts had a central library services department listed on their website. This researcher contacted the district library directors and asked them to share an invitation with their elementary school librarians. University of Houston-Clear Lake and Sam Houston University

offer master's degrees in school library and information science. This researcher asked the program directors to share information about the study with their alumni groups. The researcher also posted an invitation on the Texas Library Association School Library Roundtable requesting interested parties.

The sample came from elementary school librarians who were in the fixed rotation and interviewed to gather data about their experiences of collaboration: the challenges and their successes. The researcher used the web-based application Riverside.FM to conduct interviews. Fourteen school librarians participated in a 1:1 interview about their experiences collaborating with classroom teachers. Four school librarians with self-described successful collaborative partnerships joined a focus group. The focus group further discussed the strategies, tools, and support school libraries require to build successful collaborative partnerships with classroom teachers.

Research Questions

RQ1

How do school librarians within a fixed schedule perceive a culture of collaboration and collaborative partnerships?

RQ2

How does a fixed schedule affect a culture of collaboration as perceived by a school librarian within a fixed rotation?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on standards published by the American Association of School Libraries (AASL) and standards published by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The

AASL Standards Framework for School Librarians (2017) has six shared foundations, one of which is Collaborate. TSLAC and TEA, under the authority of the Texas Legislature and Title 13, published *School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines for Texas*. The standards have seven strands. Strand 7 contains metrics to measure library programs' service to students and teachers, including collaboration: co-teaching, co-creating, and co-assessing lessons with teachers (AASL, 2018; TEA, 2017).

These professional and state organizations stress the importance of placing librarians on a flexible schedule, allowing them to collaborate with teachers to build units of instruction and curriculum (Sturge, 2019). Many schools lack libraries or the professionals to run a library program. For example, Houston ISD – the largest school district in Texas- has twenty-three librarians for 274 schools after the superintendent turned school libraries into discipline centers (Mizan, 2025). Even in schools with libraries, principals often place librarians on a fixed rotating schedule to cover teacher planning time, which can hinder effective collaboration.

Studies have established that school librarians contribute to student success, especially if there is a culture of collaboration between the librarian and classroom teachers (Merga et al., 2021). Despite the proven benefits, school librarians often face challenges in the rotation, limited time for collaboration, and unclear expectations of their role. Librarians advocate for their positions by building collaborative partnerships with teachers despite these barriers. Collaboration improves student learning outcomes by elevating student engagement (Kammer et al., 2021). Although the literature reviewed finds collaboration is essential to the school library's success, it does not mention how librarians in the rotation can achieve this critical competency. This researcher aimed to investigate what enables or constrains school librarians' collaboration with other educators while serving in the ancillary rotation.

The primary objective for this study was to understand how school librarians can effectively establish and shape a culture of collaboration while on the rotation, considering the constraints of their schedules. This researcher explored how school librarians defined collaboration. This researcher investigated how school librarians perceived their ability to co-plan, co-present, and co-assess units of instruction within their fixed schedule and how this ability was influenced by the support from peers and administrators and the prevailing culture of collaboration.

Definitions of Key Terms

AASL Competencies

AASL Competencies measure what practicing school librarians demonstrate in their day-to-day working environment (Burns & Dawkins, 2021).

Collaboration

Collaboration is a process that combines the strengths of two or more individuals in productive relationships that can positively influence student learning. The collegial partnership uses everyone's expertise and builds respect, inclusion, shared leadership, and trust while creating an instructional unit (Tallman, 2019).

Digital Citizenship

Digital citizenship is instruction in internet safety, digital well-being, copyright and fair use, and the responsible use of artificial intelligence (Cooksey, 2022).

Flexible Schedule

Flexible scheduling allows the library to be used on a just-in-time, as-needed basis that supports research and inquiry projects, training, and the use of technology with individual or

small group guidance from the librarian. Classroom teachers schedule whole-class library time or can send students individually to the library as needed (Moreillon, 2014).

In the Rotation

The rotation refers to a school librarian who is part of the rotating schedule of specialists that provides classroom teachers with their planning periods. The rotation, also called specials, ancillary, and enrichment rotation, includes classes such as art, music, language other than English, and physical education (Moreillon, 2014).

Information Literacy

Information literacy is the skill and ability to interpret data, seek the origin and authenticity of information sources, and determine the quality of information found online (Kapanka, 2022).

Learning Commons

Learning commons are combined physical and virtual spaces where students consume and create knowledge with tools available so classrooms and the library merge for learning experiences (Loertscher & Zepnik, 2019).

Planning Periods

Planning periods allow 450 minutes every two weeks for instructional preparation, including parent-teacher conferences, evaluating students' work, and planning allotted in no less than 45 minutes at a time (2 Tex. Amin. Code §21.404, 1995).

School Librarian

A school librarian, also known as a school media specialist or a teacher librarian, has completed a master's level school library and information science program and state agency

certification requirements for classroom teachers and school librarians (Lewis & McNamara, 2021).

Literature Review

Classroom teachers and administrators do not always know what a library offers the school beyond a circulating collection of books. This disconnect affects school libraries across the United States as schools and districts eliminate librarians and close library programs because of state policy changes, school board policies, and budgetary concerns. The school librarians who have a position in schools work under the pressure of knowing they must show added value to the building. Professional expectations are also based upon guidelines from national and state library organizations and state education agencies. One expected critical criterion is collaboration with other educators to co-plan and co-teach inquiry units.

School libraries provide a place for exploration of self and the world surrounding each student through research and reading diverse texts that reflect themselves or reveal the experiences of others. Open scheduling allows students and teachers access to library resources at their point of need, spontaneously coming in and out, or scheduling dedicated time with the librarian. Elementary school librarians are often placed in the ancillary or enrichment rotation to cover the planning periods of classroom educators. The fixed schedule removes free access to the library. A fixed schedule also erects barriers to collaboration, an essential element of librarian service and professional expectation.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate and analyze factors that enable or constrain school librarians' collaboration with other educators while working within the ancillary rotation. While a fixed schedule is not the ideal position, librarians create library programs that fit the schedule and cover professional criteria. The aim was to identify effective strategies,

interventions, and recommendations to facilitate and enhance the critical criterion of collaboration in educational settings.

The literature was found using ERIC, EBSCO Education Research Complete, OpenAIRE, OMNIFile Full Text Select, Google Scholar, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global databases. Keyword searches included teacher librarian, collaboration, library instruction, K12 information literacy, embedded librarians, and school library perception. Keywords were expanded to include multiple terms for school librarians: school media specialists and teacher librarians. The terms library lessons, library instruction, library curation, readers advisory, and fixed and flexible schedules were used during searches. Although this study focuses on school libraries in Texas, the search included school libraries in the rest of the United States and abroad. Each library within a school building across the world shares practices and procedures. Studies examining trends in school librarianship were considered for the literature review.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the state of school libraries with peer-reviewed articles and research that focus on the function of the library, the role of the state-certified school librarian, the role collaboration plays in placing the library as the hub of the school, and the effect that principals and scheduling have on collaboration in the library. Fixed schedules and having the library in the rotation to allow teachers a planning period inhibit collaborative partnerships between school librarians and classroom teachers. Flexible schedules provide the support students need to succeed in the digital age (Gordon & Cicchetti, 2023). This study will provide information from the experience of state-certified librarians in the rotation, on a fixed schedule, and successfully collaborating within their school setting.

Function of School Libraries

The school library is led by a professional with graduate-level training with teaching and school library certifications. The print collections, electronic resources, technology equipment, and staff often reflect a significant monetary investment within the school building. The school library plays functions and is valuable beyond its budgetary costs. The school library is the center of literacy (Abdul, 2022; Klein, 2023), inquiry, ethical use of information (Lewis & McNamara, 2021), digital citizenship and technology skills (Belair & Waskie-Laura, 2021), and community (Rodriguez, 2019; Spiering & Lechtenberg, 2020). It is the center for multiple literacies, of which the best-known is reading. The library is integral in providing materials for reading for pleasure.

The school library provides access to reading material and enhances the campus reading culture. Public and private schools that serve elementary students are more apt to have school libraries to promote reading literacy (Abdul, 2022; Klein, 2023). Students with access to school libraries during early literacy continue reading for pleasure and fun longer. Reading for pleasure drops significantly after age nine (Clark et al., 2023; YouGov, 2019). Through collaboration, classroom teachers can work with librarians to enhance literacy skills through read-aloud, book talks, and exploration using primary sources and the subject matter in picture books. Together, bridging interest in reading into the higher primary grades, they can promote reading as an activity that brings information and enjoyment.

Rudy Bishop (1990) was the first to describe books as mirrors, windows, and sliding doors. Books allow readers to see themselves reflected in the pages and build empathy through different perspectives. They also allow readers to enter other worlds to see and imagine the lives of others. The library is a safe place to find literature and research material that reflects the entire

society. It is a judgment-free zone that provides reading and research materials for every sector of society (Abdul, 2022). Because school libraries represent everyone in a pluralistic society, they have become targets for politicians (Lambert, 2020).

Top state politicians advocate for banning materials by creators of color that speak out against racism. Books about the immigrant experience that show the realities that non-white immigrants face and books that portray a queer experience are also on official political lists for removal from schools and public libraries. School libraries have curated collections that represent marginalized groups that Texas lawmaker Matt Kraus said, "might make students feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress because of their race or sex" (Chappell, 2021, p. 1).

Amid efforts to remove reading materials, school boards in several Texas districts are eliminating their school librarians and libraries due to budget cuts. Cy-Fair ISD reduced library positions by half when it eliminated fifty librarians (Zuvanich, 2024), while Spring Branch ISD has four floating librarians to cover 38 schools (Sander, 2024). Houston ISD, the largest school district in Texas, is turning school libraries into discipline rooms (Morelan, 2023). Houston ISD has 23 librarians out of 274 school buildings (Mizan, 2025), cutting not only access to reading for pleasure, but to information and resources found in school libraries.

School libraries provide equitable access to students who may not have access to resources otherwise (Lance et al., 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, school libraries provided students without access to resources at home with technology, laptops, and Wi-Fi hotspots (Wake, 2022). Studies have found that schools with high levels of students living in poverty, eligible for free lunch, or having special needs are less apt to have school libraries (Alfeld, 2019; Klein, 2023; Lance & Kachel, 2022). Many schools do not have technology staff

to troubleshoot device, connectivity, and application issues. Librarians become the defacto help desk of the building.

School libraries adapt their space as technologies and societal needs change. Libraries, once a collection of books, have expanded their space beyond the walls by providing databases, online learning objects, and eBooks. It is a place of innovative teaching and learning, taking risks to rebrand itself to remain relevant on campus (Berg et al., 2019). Databases provided by the school district may go unused during the year without direct teaching to faculty and students (Barber, 2023). Without intervention, students find answers to research questions from unvetted sources found through search engines like Google and its AI responses. Databases provide information curated by reliable publishers.

Learning Commons, an adaptation of the school library, is a space for student-centered technology use and collaboration (Frilot, 2023; Galanos, 2020; Loertscher & Zepnik, 2019). Learning Commons reimagines the library as a gathering place for scholars, makers, and learning. The space is inviting, with mobile, flexible, and functional furnishings for various instructional and non-instructional uses (TSLAC & TEA, 2017). Galanos (2020) found that schools with higher student scores have learning commons, but they found no conclusive findings that library commons directly lead to student success. Library Commons emphasizes collaboration, inquiry, and community over book storage.

Academic honesty skills begin earlier in school with libraries. Using information ethically begins with instruction in citing sources, avoiding plagiarism, and being a good digital citizen. School libraries are the center of instruction in the use of information (Betts, 2023; Klein, 2023). School librarians are the building experts on the ethical use of information. Classroom

teachers are not taught the implications of copyright and information use, but library education programs focus on information literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, and digital citizenship.

Students must be taught academic integrity and copyright compliance early. School librarians take the lead to ensure classroom teachers have the academic integrity and copyright literacy information they need. Library instruction must be fully embedded in the curriculum to fully implement a schoolwide program that teaches students how to access, use, and present information. Collaboration with classroom instructors is a necessity; the earlier a student's scholastic career starts, the better (Hosseini, 2024).

Cox (2023) described the school library as the hub for student learning of multiple literacies, a place that ensures equity, and a flexible space that allows student collaboration and community engagement. A school with a fully staffed and functioning library reflects a culture of learning beyond the core curriculum and state standards. It signals that the school values information literacy, digital citizenship, and reading for pleasure, with students accessing a wide range of books that reflect themselves and society. As school districts eliminate librarians and close libraries, the professionals left in the field must advocate for their positions and ensure that their role within the school is understood.

Role of School Librarian

In Texas, a school librarian is a professional position that requires a master's degree, a minimum of two years of classroom experience, successful completion of a school library program, and an examination for Texas school librarian certification (19 Tex. Admin. Code §239.60). Although the state certification is called school librarian, the position can be known as a school media specialist, information literacy specialist, librarian, or teacher-librarian. School librarian is the preferred job title by the American Association of School Libraries (AASL) and

the term this researcher uses. School libraries considered fully staffed include at least one librarian and one library clerk (AASL, 2018; TEA, 2017).

Libraries have an impact on instruction and reading culture in the school. Schools with librarians are found to have better scores in high-stakes testing. Studies show that the presence of a full-time certified librarian is consistently linked to high scores in reading and math. Librarians impact student achievement in academic performance, graduation rates, and writing skills (Borden, 2023; Wine, 2020; Wine et al., 2023), particularly in schools with many low-income students (Andrew, 2020). The connection between student success and school librarians relies on multiple variables: access to materials, books for research, information, and reading for pleasure. Students benefit from the library resources, of course, but databases alone do not replace the experience and knowledge a librarian brings to the library. Credentialed librarians significantly contribute to student scores and research and information literacy skills (Gordon & Cicchetti, 2023).

School librarians are the experts on campus for information literacy, digital citizenship, educational technology, and research skills (Davis, 2020; Lance et al., 2023). Davis (2020) also found a significant improvement in research and writing scores among high school juniors who worked directly with school librarians. Gilstrap (2019) said students learn workplace skills, communication, technology use, critical thinking, and collaboration when a librarian is integrated into inquiry and research units. School librarians are instrumental in teaching research and inquiry skills. They are the central figure for innovative teaching methods that engage students with educational technology that makes learning relevant and authentic (Berg et al., 2019).

Golden (2020) recognized that teachers across disciplines view the librarian as a valuable component for students completing a research project. Teachers acknowledge that they seldom

involve the librarian in the research process. Respondents worried that librarians were already too busy or had too much on their plates. The study also found that library anxiety exists among students who have encountered the library as a place of discipline (Golden, 2020). Librarians must reach out to fellow educators to bring them into the library for collaborative partnerships so that teachers can reimagine the librarian role. Librarians must also ensure that the administration does not use the library as a punitive place. All discipline matters belong elsewhere.

A librarian creates a place for exploring society and self, which is accomplished by establishing inclusive collections and reading programs. Parents and teachers may not be aware of all the literacies taught in the library, but they do expect school librarians to set the culture of reading within a school. The school librarian impacts student learning by promoting reading for pleasure (Abdul, 2022; Bordon, 2023; Merga et al., 2021). Librarians collaborating with reading teachers can scaffold the required reading with book selections that match the tone, theme, and concepts supporting student learning (Gordon & Cicchetti, 2023). A culture of reading helps students across the curriculum. Students who read have higher scores in information literacy. Reading skills help students who work with software designed to teach information literacy skills (Wade et al., 2020). Software programs can help students, but the interaction with an information professional engages students, teachers, and parents.

The relationships built with students revolve around personal support in finding information and books. There is a focus librarians attend to that fosters a community around reading. School librarians are taught to conduct readers' advisory interview techniques with students to find the best book for that student. Tension has formed between promoting reading for pleasure and shifting focus to information literacy (Keeling, 2023). The school librarian finds a balance between print and technology literacy to succeed in the eyes of stakeholders. Students,

parents, and principals value reading and see the library as an integral part of that pursuit, but district administrators and superintendents do not recognize that librarians contribute more than a library clerk or parent volunteer would contribute.

The role of the school librarian can differ from district to district or even school to school within the same district. Unclear expectations and the underutilization of a professional with teaching certifications and graduate-level degrees in information science show that research needs to be conducted on district-level expectations (Croft, 2022). School librarians can be transformative leaders who significantly alter the library's space and educational climate, welcoming a student-centered space (Frilot, 2023). Their skills extend beyond library program management and educational technology to having an impact on the overall school environment.

Ahlfeld (2019) found that librarians who take on leadership roles in their schools and districts bring visibility to their skills as educators and library programs. Wake (2022) found that there is a lack of structured mechanisms for school librarians to be included in decision-making processes. School administration and district leaders do not know how to harness the skills librarians possess properly. Soulen (2021) found that librarians impact new teacher resilience. Librarians who collaborate with first-year teachers build a sense of trust and community. The collaboration can show first-year teachers how classrooms are managed and how the flow of a lesson engages students. First-year teachers benefit from collaborative relationships with their grade-level peers and the librarian.

Belzowski and Robinson (2019) found that librarians who created a RUBRIC as a guide for collaboration could facilitate conversations with faculty more easily, helping bring an understanding of information literacy and the potential contribution of librarians as partners in instruction. Although this study was in an academic setting, the principle applies equally to a

K12 setting. Using a collaboration guide shows classroom teachers where the librarian takes the lead and where the teacher uses their subject expertise to create balanced lessons incorporating co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessment. True collaboration creates a unit that builds a foundation on the participants' skills.

Beyond one-on-one collaborations, Koh et al. (2022) showed that librarians are valuable assets on campus for teachers' in-house professional development. Presenting methods to bring inquiry with a common vocabulary across grade levels cohesively builds a culture of research that extends beyond the curriculum. Professional development in educational technology improves student engagement and real-life, relevant skills applied to daily learning.

The role of the librarian is evolving. There is an expectation to retain the traditional role of reading while moving into a technology support role (Abdul, 2022), from being a keeper of books to a facilitator of information literacy (Keeling, 2023). COVID-19 allowed librarians to show how relevant they were to the learning environment. There was a heightened importance to students knowing how to access information and coursework through technology (Kanpanka, 2021) while classroom teachers adapted to their role as online instructors. While some school librarians in their study felt underutilized and not fully tapped during the pandemic, others said they formed informal communities to support reading and student learning (Wake, 2022). Librarians found a way to work and collaborate with teachers to bring learning objects and embedded tutorials to online classrooms.

Librarians are the education technology point person on campus. They know how to integrate technology into the curriculum to bring more engagement to lessons, further inquiry processes, and deliver culminating products to units. During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools turned to librarians to distribute 1:1 technology and hotspots and troubleshoot connection

problems. Technology concerns were routed to the library so librarians could help parents, grandparents, and babysitters connect to learning management systems. Families required assistance, and the librarian was able to connect students to lessons, online conference sessions, and digital resources (Kapanka, 2021). Librarians shared asynchronous online tutorials with families to help them adjust to remote learning. Librarians are specialized teachers who bridge all instruction to each student.

School librarians are information specialists, teachers, instructional leaders, program administrators, and collaborative partners (Andrew, 2020). They are often considered keepers of the books by leaders who do not fully understand their full capabilities. This limitation can inhibit a school librarian's ability to make it to the leadership table, so they must advocate for themselves and market their most visible role to school leaders: collaboration.

Professional Collaboration

Collaboration and coteaching among educators have effectively driven individual student success. Trust, respect, and collegiality are fostered in a collaborative relationship (Winesburgh, 2023). In one study, student success rates improved from 50% to 70-100% success rate when lessons were co-taught rather than solo-taught (Loestscher & Zepnik, 2019). Students benefitted from the combined expertise of the school librarian and the core subject teacher. Because there is a shift from traditional mass education to a personalized learning paradigm, co-teaching can engage students from different angles (Gordon & Cicchetti, 2023).

Librarians are taught the importance of collaboration during their graduate work and school librarian certification program. Professional literature reflects the importance of this critical AASL competency of school library programming. Librarians on all levels of education, from early childhood to higher education, collaborate with their educational peers to leverage

their expertise in information and data literacy (Pothier & Condon, 2023). They learn that collaboration can have various levels of commitment but ideally includes three parts: co-planning, co-implementing, and co-assessing alongside teachers (Koh et al., 2022).

Faculty and librarians require time for dynamic, ongoing planning, adaptation, and reflection on what students need to connect to the curriculum. The right culture at school supports collaboration among teachers and librarians, enabling librarians to form essential connections vital for student growth. School librarians can curate collections collaboratively and build source material for students that connects concepts across topics, providing a deeper understanding of complex inquiries (Spiering and Lechtenberg, 2020).

A collaborative culture describes an environment where collaboration is supported and expected by school leaders and teachers. It is characterized by inclusion, trust, shared leadership, and respect. Teachers feel valued and can take risks with their teaching techniques, trying emerging technologies and projects (Tallman, 2019). Collaboration can foster friendships and support networks, strengthening a sense of community among teachers because of a shared commitment (Kammer et al., 2021).

Collaboration is not limited to partnering with classroom teachers. Librarians can partner with school counselors to deliver social and emotional learning units to strengthen a positive culture among students (Cox, 2023) while ensuring a comprehensive approach to skills development across the curriculum (Gilstrap, 2019; Himmelstein, 2019). A critical link exists between student well-being, self-management, social intelligence, and academic success. Libraries are places that welcome everyone with curated, representative collections, and connecting to other parties in the building who participate in supplying a nurturing environment is a logical extension. Interdisciplinary collaboration enhances social and academic skills through

engagement with authentic projects that prepare students for future challenges (Cox, 2023; Hurley, 2023). Educators and students both benefit from an environment that encourages a collaborative spirit.

Schools with regular librarian and teacher collaboration consistently showed better student performance (Frilot, 2023; Galanos, 2020). Together, librarians and teachers create innovative teaching practices that engage students in research. The librarian facilitates access to information and integrates library standards that complement the classroom teacher's expertise in the subject matter (Hurley, 2023; Kammer et al., 2021; Koh et al., 2022). School librarians bring emergent technologies to shared lessons so students can use new digital tools and platforms to express their learning creatively (Betts, 2023).

Librarians continuously update library collections to reflect the needs of the teachers and curriculum by curating diverse and contemporary resources. Proactive collaborations with teachers integrate these resources into engaging lessons (Betts, 2023). By working with teachers directly, librarians better understand the types of resources that best integrate with their units of study. This collaboration is the primary vehicle for professional learning. It strengthens teachers' understanding of information and digital literacy and provides diverse resources to teachers (Lewis & McNamara, 2021). The relationships built during collaboration strengthen the library's standing within the school.

Beyond planning co-teaching collaborations, school librarians can build a collection of resources that connects concepts across the curriculum. Teachers tend to think of research in terms of topics, but deeper conceptual understanding raises inquiry for students to a higher plain (Spiering & Lechtenberg, 2020). While developing the collection, librarians who collaborate with teachers across the school have a bird's eye view of the connection between

concepts in different subject areas. Classroom teachers require instruction through collaboration to understand how they can affect change in materials available in the library.

Although professional collaboration is the goal, Keeling (2023) found a discrepancy between its ideals and its practice. Principals, teachers, and librarians all understand that collaboration is beneficial, but it does not happen independently. Keeling (2023) recommended that librarians find innovative ways to collaborate with teachers. Because teacher training does not stress the importance of collaboration with school librarians, the onus is on the librarian to build partnerships.

Collaborating partners need time to co-plan a unit and assess and reflect on the shared experience. A lack of structured collaboration time is built into the schedule (Tallman, 2019). Decision-makers, district superintendents, school principals, and board members create the learning environment within which collaboration can grow or fail to flourish.

School Culture and Fixed Schedules

The school library has stakeholders, including principals, teachers, parents, and students (Kizziar, 2021; Lance et al., 2023) who want something specific from the library. In turn, their expectations influence the culture of the library. Building principals significantly affect the culture of the school and the library (Wake, 2022). School leaders' decisions about the library are informal, based on local intuition and guidance, not based on studies (Borden, 2022). These decisions combine structural, pragmatic, or strategic reasons (Lance et al., 2023). Decisions that affect the library positively are strategic or long-term and are based on what is best for students and equity. Decisions that usually hurt libraries and lower their esteem tend to be structural and are based on immediate budgetary or enrollment needs.

Budget constraints are the most significant library threat (Borden, 2023). If they must choose staffing, instructional coaches and technology are chosen over librarians (Ahlfed, 2019). In their study, Lewis (2019) found that administrators view instructional coaches as an extension of themselves in English Language Arts (ELA) leadership. They see librarians as an occasional support resource when they are distributing leadership tasks. Merga et al. (2021), though, interviewed principals who advocate for school librarians to be a part of educational planning and decision-making processes. The participants in the study were chosen based on the strength of the library programs.

Because principals' perception of the library determines school-wide digital literacy and technology initiatives (Andrew, 2020), librarians need to reach out and collaborate with the principal during professional development opportunities. The problem is more significant than building principals. There is a national decline in school libraries nationwide, with the biggest drop being in California and Michigan (Ahlfeld, 2019). A gap exists between the roles defined by AASL (2018) and the limited perceptions of stakeholders of school libraries about a librarian's capabilities (Kizziar, 2021).

The role of the librarian and the library's function has shifted for the last fifty years as technology and the populace's needs have changed. Librarians must advocate for themselves and their place in K12 schools to ensure administrators know what they are doing. Librarians are considered people who quietly work in the background, supporting educators by checking out books and keeping shelves tidy. Librarians are agents of change and school leaders who advocate for the freedom to read and access to information.

The role is evolving from cooperation to collaboration, actively participating in curriculum and instructional design (Branch-Mueller & Rodger, 2022; Moen, 2022; Torres,

2022). Wong (2021) described the phenomenon as “transforming from invisible to invincible” (p. 38). Part of advocacy is publicizing successful programming through newsletters and social media. Targeted collaboration with the principal and leading professional development at faculty meetings place school librarians in a visible leadership role. When budgets become tight, a visible partner and leader would be more challenging to remove from campus.

Fixed schedules in school libraries place librarians in the ancillary or enrichment rotation, limiting the potential for collaboration between librarians and teachers. This schedule rotation has been a traditional part of elementary schools. It allows classroom teachers to participate in their PLC meetings and planning periods after dropping off their students, so librarians will never share a planning period with any core classroom teacher. Sturge (2019) interviewed classroom teachers and found three barriers to forming collaborative projects with their school librarian. 61% of the teachers cited time as the biggest barrier; 29% said they did not share planning periods. Only 5% were unaware of collaborative opportunities with school librarians.

A fixed library schedule limits the amount of time a librarian can meet with classroom teachers and participate in instructional programming (Lewis, 2021). Teachers are always short on time, but having the ability to meet with team leads during PLC meetings would significantly increase collaboration. The ability to meet with teachers during a planned time allows librarians to explain that the library is an extension of the classroom and, together, can effectively meet the needs of each student (Adair, 2023; Tallman, 2019).

Summary

Legislation such as No Child Left Behind and others focusing on core content affects decisions about school libraries and other elective courses. Policy changes, too, cause fluctuating support for libraries (Borden, 2023; Keeling, 2023). With school libraries in peril of closing,

librarians may not want to ask for flexible schedules that contribute to the success of collaborative relationships. Principals and other school leaders place the library in an ancillary rotation to provide teachers with their required planning periods, which is in its most helpful place: each child gets to visit the library, and teachers get their time. School librarians will continue to advocate for themselves but must find a way to collaborate with teachers and build relationships with stakeholders.

It has been established that collaboration benefits student outcomes, builds resilience in teachers, and creates a positive work environment. There is a need, though, for further study on how school librarians can create collaborative opportunities with teachers. Studies are needed to investigate the barriers and facilitators of successful collaboration (Berg et al., 2019) and the barriers that prevent librarians from being recognized as instructional leaders (Lewis, 2019). Further study can examine the dynamics of power and diversity within collaborative teams that influence the collaborative process (Tallman, 2019) and facilitators that inform partnership strategies (Hurley, 2023).

Collaboration may look different in a library on a fixed schedule. Librarians may need to redefine collaboration in a contemporary setting. Further study is needed to identify factors that enable collaboration and determine how to measure its success with a practical librarian and teacher collaboration model that maximizes student learning outcomes (Merga et al., 2021). Librarians should explore the most effective strategies for initiating and maintaining collaboration between themselves and stakeholders in the community (Betts, 2023), how to overcome challenges (Kammer et al., 2021; Koh et al., 2022) and identify best practices for co-planning and co-teaching (Lewis & McNamara, 2021). This study will help find the strategies that enable librarians to collaborate with their peers on a fixed schedule.

Ethical Assurances

Ethical considerations guided research designs and practices from the beginning of the project, from selecting a topic to presenting the findings. Principles of ethical consideration included respect for the group being studied, an obligation to do no harm, and ensuring justice and equal benefits to those in the study. The researcher considered the following requirements: informed consent, risk/benefit assessment, and how participants were selected (Belmont Report, 1979).

Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. The sample of participants was chosen because they were professional certified school librarians with master's degrees working in an urban school district in Texas. The sample included school librarians who worked in an elementary school and were in a fixed rotation of ancillary enrichment classes. The study population comprised professional peers over whom the researcher had no influence. The researcher is a school librarian who works in an elementary school and teaches in an ancillary rotation. The interview questions were from a peer in the field of library science whom participants could trust to understand their work environment.

Informed consent covered three aspects: sharing information about the study so participants could make an informed decision, thoroughly explaining the process to be used and the time commitment, and ensuring participants knew it was a voluntary study (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). A written document explaining the scope of the study and its purpose was shared with the participants. The researcher ensured that participants understood how data would be collected, how long the interviews would take, how the data would be analyzed, and when results were expected.

Confidentiality was essential as it allowed participants to be candid about barriers they encounter during efforts to collaborate with fellow educators. Transcripts were shared with participants to ensure the conversation were recorded and transcribed correctly. During focus groups, participants met each other. The necessity for confidentiality was explained before beginning the discussion. Because this was a group dynamic, one cannot completely guarantee confidentiality, so participants were made aware of the risks involved.

Safeguards that protected participants' identity and privacy were essential to maintaining their privacy and confidentiality. Participant names, schools, or school districts are not revealed in the published study, and records were kept secure throughout the study. The researcher explained the importance of confidentiality, thereby gaining the participant's trust. Participants must trust the researcher to keep their answers confidential to receive relevant and open discussion. Personal data containing names and school affiliations are stored on an offline drive. Other data is saved in password-protected files. Data will be securely stored for three years following IRB requirements.

The study received approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before data collection. Permission to interview school librarians was obtained from their school site administration. A study description was shared with the administration to ensure they were comfortable with their staff sharing strategies for successful collaboration and barriers they overcome.

Summary

Professional organizations like the American Association of School Libraries (AASL) and state bodies such as the Texas Education Agency (TEA) set guidelines for staffing libraries with qualified professionals holding master's degrees in library and information science, two

years of classroom experience, and TEA school library certification. They also advocate for flexible schedules to facilitate collaboration between librarians and teachers.

Librarians are integral to the educational framework, collaborating with teachers to develop curriculum units and enhance information literacy, encompassing digital literacy, digital citizenship, data literacy, and technology skills. The importance of librarians in aiding students in differentiating concepts and topics, thereby fostering critical thinking, is highlighted. Librarians must work closely with teachers to integrate library resources and information literacy into the curriculum. Research suggests a positive correlation between effective library services staffed by professionals and effective collaboration.

There is a significant need for librarians to establish strong collaborative relationships across all levels of the school community to maintain the relevance and efficacy of the library. AASL library standards, published in 2018, redefined professional collaboration by focusing on joint instructional efforts with teachers. There is a positive correlation between well-staffed libraries and student reading scores. Collaboration between librarians and teachers is crucial, yet there is a noted gap in teacher awareness of the librarians' collaborative role, underscoring the need to actively promote their skills and roles within schools.

Despite the clear benefits, some educators and administrators need a complete understanding of the librarians' potential roles, which hinders effective collaboration. The section underscores librarians' need to actively market their expertise in information management and curriculum support to foster a collaborative environment. Fixed library schedules significantly hinder librarians' ability to plan curriculum units with grade-level teams and affect student academic performance, particularly in reading. The rigidity of such schedules limits librarians'

ability to engage freely with teachers and students, impacting the overall utility and integration of the library within the school's educational activities.

Further research was needed to explore and address the challenges librarians face due to fixed schedules and find effective strategies for collaboration despite these constraints.

Budgetary and policy factors affect a principal's decision on staffing and schedules. A flexible schedule is not always available to a school librarian. The qualitative study aimed to understand how librarians manage collaboration within the limitations of their schedules and identify practices that could enhance their effectiveness.

This section established the necessity of qualified, flexible librarians in schools and the benefits of their collaborative interactions with teachers while identifying fixed schedules as a critical challenge to achieving optimal collaborative outcomes. The proposed research aimed to explore these dynamics further to enhance librarians' role and impact in educational settings. School librarians fill a crucial role in academic settings, highlighting the need for strategies to foster proactive collaboration with teaching staff to enhance student learning and information literacy.

Section 2: Methodology and Design

The problem this study addressed was that fixed library schedules inhibit collaborative partnerships between school librarians and classroom teachers and the creation of a collaborative culture within a school. The AASL's National School Library Standards and the shared foundation of Collaborate give the school librarian the responsibility "to establish and shape a culture of collaboration in the school community" (Coleman, 2020, xvi). School librarians contribute to student success, especially if there is a culture of collaboration between the librarian and classroom teachers (Merga et al., 2021). Golden (2020) found that teachers felt that the library positively impacts student research but were reluctant to work with the librarian. Some teachers reported time constraints, students finding the library intimidating, database confusion, and not knowing how the librarian could help. Another barrier is a lack of school administration support, time, and scheduling difficulties because of inflexible schedules (Lewis, 2021). Without a culture of collaboration on campus, educators do not learn how students can use databases, what resources are available, and how the librarian is an instructional partner.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how school librarians build a culture of collaboration with other educators while in the ancillary rotation. The aim was to identify effective strategies, interventions, and recommendations to facilitate and enhance collaboration in educational settings. Kammer et al. (2021) explained that collaboration improves student learning outcomes by elevating student engagement. Planning time can prove difficult with the school librarian in the rotation.

This was a qualitative case study with a social constructivist worldview. This section explains the design or plan of when and from whom data was collected. The methodology of

how data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted is also described. This section also explains who the participants were and how they were chosen to be included in this study.

Design and Methodology

This qualitative case study investigated a contemporary situation, group, or event within its real-life context when the boundaries between the situation and context were not evident (Yin, 2018). A qualitative case study comprehensively describes and analyzes a single social unit in a particular situation with a specific problem (Merriam, 1998). The researcher studied people in a real-life contemporary setting who have a shared experience.

This researcher explored the ability of school librarians in a fixed schedule rotation to create a collaborative culture and collaborate with other educators on campus. A case study can go down two main pathways: interpretive and critical. Interpretive case studies look at a group or entity as it currently exists. Critical case studies advocate for changes to an oppressive system. In this case, the fixed schedule of ancillary rotation has the possibility of oppressing and restricting the opportunity for collaboration. State and national guidelines recommend that school librarians be on a flexible schedule. School librarians enact strategies to modify the system to deal with the imposed restraints of this fixed schedule. The researcher proposed illuminating school librarians' strategies to collaborate while in a fixed schedule.

Case studies have a systematic approach. The researcher determines if the research problem has a clearly defined boundary that is current and engages in purposeful sampling to which they have access (Creswell, 2013). The boundary of this study was currently employed school librarians in a fixed, ancillary rotation in elementary schools in an urban Texas setting. The sample was drawn from school districts in a large metropolitan area of Texas state-certified school librarians with a master's degree in library and information science.

Information in a case study is collected using multiple methods which best assess the phenomenon. The following methods were used to collect multiple viewpoints: interviews with open-ended questions that encouraged in-depth descriptions of participant experience, focus groups that dug deeper into experiences, and artifacts, such as collaboration and lesson plans.

The researcher formulated themes from the collected data that describe in rich, thick language the context of the problem, why it happened, and how it was explained. This was where the researcher uncovered the meaning of the case. This meaning was not meant to be a generalization, but a snapshot of the case or group of people that a reader may or may not be able to apply to themselves or their situation. Not all school librarians are on a fixed schedule. However, the study results could help school librarians on a flexible schedule develop strategies for collaborative partnerships in their schools.

Another research design considered was phenomenological. Phenomenology focuses on the meaning of a phenomenon as experienced by several people (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher looks for the common thread that every participant shares while experiencing the phenomenon. School librarians on a fixed schedule share the phenomenon of building collaborative relationships with limited time and means. They all have commonalities concerning the barriers and limitations they face.

The phenomenology method proposed by Moustakas (1994) always begins with two questions: What is your experience with the phenomenon, and what situation influenced or affected your experience with the phenomenon? Both foundational questions could uncover information about a school librarian's experience with fixed rotations and barriers to collaboration. This method is used to find a universal essence of individual experiences. School librarians are guided by state and national standards, but their experiences may not have a

universal thread. This researcher was not seeking commonalities between school librarians in a fixed schedule but how their experience shaped their understanding of collaboration with classroom teachers.

The case study approach offered the opportunity to advocate for change within the limiting system of fixed schedules and discover strategies to overcome the barriers caused by inclusion in an ancillary rotation. School librarians are expected to create a culture of collaboration (the “case”) while teaching in the rotation (context). The boundaries between the phenomenon and the context were unclear (Yin, 2018). Because of this distinction, a case study approach was chosen.

The data analysis protocol consisted of iteratively examining and categorizing evidence from the raw data collected from interviews, focus groups, and artifacts (Yin, 2018). The approach to thematic analysis followed the steps laid out by Naeem et al. (2023). The approach used a six-stage theme analysis technique to decipher qualitative data. It was a structured, sequential method where each step builds upon itself. The organized method promotes consistency and replicability of findings. Connections were made between data, interpretations, and conclusions. The Naeem et al. (2023) approach has six steps:

Step 1: Transcription, data familiarization, and quotation selection.

Step 2: Selection of keywords.

Step 3: Coding of the data.

Step 4: Development of themes.

Step 5: Conceptualization through interpretation of keywords, codes, and themes.

Step 6: Development of a conceptual model. (p 15)

Naeem et al. (2023) build on the thematic analysis technique proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This new six-step strategy proposed a systematic approach to examining and interpreting qualitative data, increasing the reliability of study findings.

Population and Sample

The population chosen for this study was Texas school librarians. The target population was elementary school librarians in Texas who taught within a fixed rotation schedule. Texas school librarians hold a master's degree in library and information studies or equivalent and a School Librarian certificate issued by the state of Texas. Texas has legislated the requirements for a school librarian as one who has completed a state-approved school librarian preparation program, completed the examination based on the state standards, holds a master's degree from an accredited institution of higher education, and has two creditable years of teaching experience as a classroom teacher (Requirements for the Issuance of the Standard School Librarian Certificate, 2009). School librarians who have completed the requirements have the knowledge and training to understand the importance of collaboration and the culture that supports partnerships.

The target population was purposively selected from elementary school librarians within a fixed rotation schedule from a county in Texas with 600 elementary schools. After the researcher had IRB approval, a recruitment email was sent to elementary school librarians in 19 independent districts in Texas. With the dearth of central district departments, school librarians with a presence on their school's website were contacted directly.

A call for participants included a list of three questions to determine whether the librarian had met the recruitment criteria for the study. Participants must have a Texas school librarian certificate, a fixed rotation schedule, and collaborative partnerships. Fourteen participants were

selected based on their library schedule, certification level, and experience with collaborative partnerships. Texas-certified elementary school librarians who taught in a fixed rotation shared commonalities and overlapping experiences. They had earned a master's degree in a library program emphasizing the importance of collaboration with classroom teachers. They all experienced difficulties collaborating with classroom teachers while on a fixed rotation. Any differences appeared in how school librarians have altered their own understanding of what constitutes successful collaborative partnerships and what steps they have taken to make that possible. This researcher believed that data saturation was met with fourteen school librarians.

Materials/Instrumentation

The data collection instrument included ten open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A). Data was collected during interviews conducted by Riverside.FM online conference calls with school librarians. Survey questions were developed based on the AASL shared foundation of school library standards (Coleman, 2020) and TSLAC's School Libraries Standards and Guidelines (Texas State Library and Archives Commission & The Texas Education Agency, 2017). During the interviews, artifacts such teacher/librarian collaboration forms that document collaborative lesson co-planning, co-teaching, co-assessment, and shared lesson plans were collected. The documentation gave insight into the process of shared responsibility of teaching a lesson.

The interview questionnaire was created for the study to field test the interview questions. Questions were created to determine whether the concept of collaboration defined by school library and information science programs and professional associations reflected the reality of elementary school librarians in the field. Participant career experience altered or shifted the concept of collaboration they acquired while in library school. Questions began by asking for the

participants' definitions of collaboration and collaborative culture. Further questions were drawn from the AASL standards for school libraries and TSLAC school library guidelines.

The interview instrument questions were presented to librarians who were no longer working in school libraries. The retired school librarians analyzed the interview questions for clarity and continuity with library standards. Based on feedback, questions were modified for clarity and credibility before being used in the dissertation case study.

Permission to work with human subjects was acquired from the National University IRB. After IRB approval, eligible school librarians were found on school websites. An email was sent to the posted email on the school website (see Appendix E). A consent request was sent to their building principal if a librarian was hesitant to participate without permission. The consent form included the interview protocol, level of confidentiality, and freedom to withdraw from the study (see Appendix B). Assurances of anonymity of the school and the school district safeguarded the privacy of the school and the school librarian. Only one librarian felt the need to ask for permission.

Data Collection and Analysis

The National University Institutional Review Board (IRB) provides ethical and regulatory oversight of human subjects research intended for publication or to contribute to generalizable knowledge (National University, 2024). The human subjects used in this study were adults teaching in public schools in Texas. This researcher followed IRB guidelines and ensured that participant fully understood the research study. The aim of the research was explained, participant informed consent and autonomy was established, along with any risks or benefits involved in the research.

Data was collected during interviews after school hours using Riverside.FM online conferencing software. The software allowed for the recording of interviews for accurate transcription and coding. After-hours meetings ensured that the school librarian had no imminent class. Data was also collected from artifacts supplied to the researcher in teacher/librarian collaboration forms and planning documents the participant used for co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessing joint lessons between the school librarian and classroom teachers. The codex was applied to the planning documentation in the form. Librarians used collaboration forms that collaborative participants fill out during co-planning. Collaboration forms were examined for themes. Fourteen librarians were chosen for the study and interviewed. Three school librarians who have indicated successful collaboration programming in their school were invited to participate in a focus group to discuss their strategies.

Interview and focus group responses from participating school librarians were analyzed using the Naeem et al. (2023) approach to thematic analysis. The first step involved familiarization with the data. All interview and focus group recordings were transcribed verbatim by the Riverside program, capturing the spoken words and non-verbal cues such as pauses and emphasis. The researcher compared the generated transcripts with the audio track to correct any mistranslated words, then sent a copy to the participant to verify the transcript with the offer to clarify or add any information. The transcripts were read multiple times to familiarize oneself with the responses. The researcher made initial notes on emerging ideas and patterns. This iterative process allowed the development of a deep understanding of the content and context, which was crucial for the subsequent coding stage.

Next, the researcher generated initial codes by systematically identifying and labeling significant words or phrases related to the research questions. Codes were assigned to keywords

to “convert raw data into manageable units.” (Naeem et al., 2023, p. 4). This open coding process involved highlighting words, phrases, and sentences that reflect school librarians' experiences, challenges, and successes in their collaborative efforts with classroom teachers. Qualitative data analysis software, Delve, was employed to organize and manage these codes. The use of the software provided a platform that ensured the accuracy and efficiency of the process. The researcher also printed the transcripts and created index cards with participant quotes and researcher notes. Manipulating the data by hand lent a purposeful and in-depth relationship with the raw data. By clustering similar codes, potential themes emerged that captured the essence of the librarians' collaborative practices. This stage was characterized by flexibility, allowing for the adjustment and refinement of codes as new insights emerged.

Finally, themes were drawn out and defined to encapsulate the key aspects of the data. This involved grouping related codes into broader themes and creating thematic maps and outlines to visualize their relationships. Each theme was clearly defined and named, with sub-themes identified to capture more detailed nuances. To ensure the rigor of the analysis, strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing were employed to ensure the themes accurately represented the data, maintaining internal coherence and clear distinctions. Triangulation involved comparing findings across different data sources, while member checking involved sharing the results with participants for validation. Peer debriefing provided an additional layer of scrutiny and insight. The final report wove these themes into a coherent narrative, illustrated with participant quotes, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the collaborative dynamics between school librarians and classroom teachers.

Assumptions

In this study, it was assumed that certified school librarians follow the AASL National School Library Standards for School Librarians and create a culture of collaboration on their campus (2018). It was also assumed that school librarians followed the School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines of Texas (2017), which recommends collaboration with classroom teachers. To be a school librarian in Texas, one must have a master's degree and a Texas school librarian certificate. The participant was not assumed to have a master's degree in school library and information science. However, participants are assumed to have completed a school library certification program and passed the required examination. A school library certification program requires 21-27 credit hours of graduate-level coursework and covers the AASL standards. The state examination covers the Texas standards and guidelines, giving school librarians the knowledge they need to build collaborative partnerships with classroom teachers.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was that the researcher focused only on elementary libraries and findings may not apply to secondary school libraries. It is not common for secondary school librarians to be placed in a rotation of enrichment or ancillary classes. The target audience that benefits from the study is elementary school librarians, particularly those in a fixed schedule rotation. Another limitation may be that participants must have a combination of an MLIS or similar master's degree and a Texas school librarian certificate. This eliminated teachers placed in school libraries as school media center specialists, although uncertified. The certification program focuses on the AASL shared competence of collaboration, on which participants were assumed to have been tested. The study relied on participants' thorough knowledge of collaborative partnerships with classroom teachers.

Delimitations

The delimitations set for the study by the researcher included the location of the study and the targeted participants. The study took place in Texas, where school libraries have guidelines and standards from the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) and Texas Education Agency (TEA) in addition to guidelines from the American Association of School Libraries (AASL), a national professional organization. Participants were TEA-certified school librarians requiring a master's degree, two years of teaching experience, and completion of a school librarian program offered at several state universities.

The targeted sample of school librarians were in a fixed schedule rotation in an elementary school. School library certification programs introduce pre-librarians with the necessary coursework to prepare them for collaborating with classroom teachers on their campus. The coursework and practicum highlight the AASL shared foundations, which include collaboration. The school librarians were well-versed in the importance of collaboration but also worked within the constraints of a fixed schedule rotation.

Summary

The study addressed the problem of fixed library schedules, which hinder collaborative partnerships between school librarians and classroom teachers, impeding the development of a collaborative culture within schools. According to the AASL's National School Library Standards, school librarians are responsible for establishing and nurturing a culture of collaboration (2018). Research indicates that collaboration between librarians and teachers positively impacts student success. However, barriers such as time constraints, ignorance of the library environment, confusion about databases and resources, and lack of support from school administration prevent effective collaboration. The aim was to explore factors that enable school

librarians to build collaborative cultures within the constraints of fixed schedules and identify strategies to facilitate this collaboration.

The researcher employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the ability of school librarians to create collaborative cultures while assigned to fixed schedules in elementary schools. The study focused on school librarians in a large metropolitan area in Texas who were TEA school librarian certified and had a master's degree in library and information science or a similar master's degree. Data collection methods included interviews, focus groups, and analysis of artifacts such as collaboration and lesson plans. The goal was to identify themes that described the context, reasons for the problem, and strategies librarians used to collaborate within a fixed schedule.

The study considered a phenomenological approach but selected a case study approach for its ability to advocate for change within the limiting system of fixed schedules. Data analysis involved examining and categorizing evidence from various sources to identify meaningful patterns and categories. The population included TEA-certified school librarians. Participants were selected from elementary schools with fixed rotation schedules in an urban Texas county. The study aimed to highlight strategies school librarians used to overcome barriers posed by fixed schedules, enhancing their ability to collaborate with classroom teachers and contribute to a collaborative culture within schools.

Section 3: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how school librarians build a culture of collaboration with other educators while in the ancillary rotation. The aim was to identify effective strategies, interventions, and recommendations to facilitate and enhance collaboration in educational settings. Kammer et al. (2021) explained that collaboration improves student learning outcomes by elevating student engagement. Planning time can prove difficult with the school librarian on the rotation.

Section 3 is organized into several components. It begins by outlining the organization of the discussion and examining the factors and limitations that may affect the interpretation of the results. Each research question is addressed individually, starting with the findings related to Research Question 1, which investigates librarians' perceptions of a collaborative culture. This is followed by a discussion of Research Question 2, which considers how a fixed schedule affects collaboration. For each research question, themes drawn from the data are presented, discussed, and outcomes evaluated to offer a broader context for understanding. The section discusses the broader implications and recommendations for school library practice. The section concludes with recommendations for future research that can build on these findings.

As a practicing school librarian working within a fixed schedule rotation, I acknowledge that my professional background and experience may shape the interpretation of the data. Because I have worked in fixed, flex, and mixed schedules during my career, I fully understand the concerns and joys of working under structural constraints. I was able to approach the findings with objectivity. Additionally, the limited sample size and the participating school librarians' specific contexts may constrain the findings' generalizability. The qualitative nature of the study

allows for rich, detailed insights into the lived experiences of school librarians navigating collaborative work within a fixed schedule model.

Findings

Participants chosen for this study were Texas elementary school librarians who taught within a fixed rotation schedule. Texas school librarians hold a master's degree in library and information studies or equivalent and a School Librarian certificate issued by the state of Texas. Texas has legislated the requirements for a school librarian as one who has completed a state-approved school librarian preparation program, completed the examination based on the state standards, holds a master's degree from an accredited institution of higher education, and has two creditable years of teaching experience as a classroom teacher (Requirements for the Issuance of the Standard School Librarian Certificate, 2009). School librarians who have completed the requirements have the knowledge and training to understand the importance of collaboration and the culture that supports partnerships. All information capable of identifying the participants has been eliminated from the presentation of findings.

The aim was to identify effective strategies, interventions, and recommendations to facilitate and enhance collaboration in educational settings between school librarians and classroom teachers. Kammer et al. (2021) explained that collaboration improves student learning outcomes by elevating student engagement. Planning time with classroom teachers can prove difficult while the school librarian is on a fixed schedule rotation.

I investigated a contemporary group within its real-life context when the boundaries between the situation and context were not evident (Yin, 2018). A qualitative case study comprehensively describes and analyzes a single social unit in a particular situation with a

specific problem (Merriam, 1998). The research studies people in a real-life contemporary setting who have shared experience.

I explored the ability of school librarians in a fixed schedule rotation to create a collaborative culture and collaborate with other educators on campus. A critical case study advocates for changes to an oppressive system. In this case, the fixed schedule of ancillary rotation has the possibility of oppressing and restricting the opportunity for collaboration. State and national guidelines recommend that school librarians be on a flexible schedule. School librarians enact strategies to modify the system to deal with the imposed restraints of this fixed schedule.

Case studies have a systematic approach. The researcher determines if the research problem has a clearly defined boundary that is current and engages in purposeful sampling to which they have access (Creswell, 2013). The boundary of this study was currently employed school librarians in a fixed, ancillary rotation in elementary school in an urban Texas setting. The sample was drawn from school districts in a large metropolitan area of Texas, state-certified school librarians with a master's degree in library and information science.

Information in this case was collected using multiple methods, which best assessed the phenomenon. The following methods were used to collect multiple viewpoints: interviews with open-ended questions that encouraged in-depth descriptions of participant experience, a focus group that dug deeper into experiences, and artifacts, such as collaboration and lesson plans. This triangulation of data strengthened the credibility of the findings by capturing consistent patterns across diverse sources.

The analysis protocol involved iteratively examining and categorizing evidence from the raw data collected from interviews, focus groups, and artifacts (Yin, 2018). The approach to

thematic analysis followed the steps laid out by Naeem et. al. (2023). The approach used a six-stage theme analysis technique to decipher qualitative data. It was a structured, sequential method where each step builds upon itself. The organized method promotes consistency and replicability of findings. Connections were made between data, interpretations, and conclusions.

The Naeem et al. (2023) approach has six steps:

Step 1: Transcription, data familiarization, and quotation selection.

Step 2: Selection of keywords.

Step 3: Coding of the data.

Step 4: Development of themes.

Step 5: Conceptualization through keywords, codes, and themes.

Step 6: Development of a conceptual model. (p15)

Naeem et al. (2023) build on the thematic analysis technique proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This six-step strategy proposed a systematic approach to examining and interpreting qualitative data, increasing the reliability of the following study findings.

Research Question 1: How do school librarians within a fixed schedule perceive a culture of collaboration and collaborative partnerships?

Participants were interviewed to reveal their perceptions of collaboration and the culture of collaboration. They shared information they learned in library school and individual stories from their experiences in the ancillary rotation. . Table 1 illustrates the themes that were pulled from the data, along with subthemes.

Table 1*Research Question One: Themes and Subthemes*

RQ 1: How do school librarians within a fixed schedule perceive a culture of collaboration and collaborative partnerships?	
Theme	Subtheme
One: Collaborative Partnerships	Expectations from Library School Experience from the Field
Two: Culture of Collaboration	Willing and Open to Ideas Collective and Inclusive of all Stakeholders Supported by Teachers and Administration
Three: Benefits of Collaboration	
Four: Drivers of Collaboration	Librarians Administration

Theme 1: Collaborative Partnerships

During the interviews, fourteen participants were asked to define collaboration. All participants graduated from their master's and certification coursework, understanding that collaborating with classroom teachers is a foundational element of the profession. This theme compares participants' knowledge and expectations of collaborative partnerships to the wisdom acquired from experience in the library. School librarians graduate as information specialists ready to co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess units of inquiry and research. Expectations of collaborative partnerships changed as experience replaced ideal collaboration with reality.

All participants in the study came out of library school with expectations of what collaboration was supposed to look like, supporting Koh et al. (2022), who found that although collaboration can have different levels of commitment, it ideally includes co-planning, co-implementing, and co-assessing lessons with teachers. Library school had prepared them to expect “a basic level of working together to further student progress and meet kids’ needs” (P3),

while “working together for a common goal” (P11). Teachers and librarians would work together on projects from the inception of an idea to the completion of the project. Participants expected to create co-lessons that carried out a common theme from inception to reality (P7).

It would not just be working together, but a balanced practice where both parties participated equally (P10), worked toward a common goal, and where partners would take ownership in the learning (P9). “Both sides want to come together to work with each other, not only one side. Not one person saying, ‘this is what we are going to do,’ but everybody working together” (P4). One librarian remembered a collaborative partnership they had in the past, “We sat down and planned it out and had a who-would-do-what kind of plan” (P9). Co-teaching is a team endeavor, one explained. The teacher will teach a piece, then the librarian will teach a piece. Collectively, they both field questions and keep students engaged and on task (P7). Participant 11 stressed that “whoever is collaborating must have a stake in or buy into it. Both parties have to be invested in the goal.”

After serving in the library, participants found that the collaborative partnerships they experienced were different from their expectations. “When I was in library school, they said to collaborate” (P12), “but teachers have no concept of that” (P13). Participant 3 said, “My expectations have shifted. My thoughts on how feasible collaboration is have changed a lot.” Participants have had to change their concept of collaborative partnerships. “I believe that co-planning and co-teaching is an idealistic view. That is kind of like what you would want to happen, but I do not feel that it always happens” (P10). Another participant said, “I think my definition has broadened in that you realize it does not have to be a big production for it to be a collaboration” (P9). “We do not have to meet physically, formally, or side by side, but we can help and support each other: (P2).

Participants were asked about lesson plan templates or forms that outline the responsibilities of the librarian and the teacher during collaboration. A few participants had started their librarianship with templates but found them unnecessary.

“I had a form that teachers could fill out, saying what resources they needed from me and what they wanted my part to be in the collaboration. Usually, teachers did not want to take the time to fill it out. They would prefer to talk about it” (P8).

Participant 5 said,

“I do not have any formal documentation that I use. I have never experienced co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessing in the real world. It has always just been a conversation in the hallway or a quick email that they need something on this topic or to go with this lesson.”

Participants perceive collaboration as support for busy classroom teachers. They help teachers by “finding how you can assist them to make their program richer, co-teaching together on lessons, and helping supply resources for them” (P8). Participants stated that they need to have time to meet with classroom teachers to know what is going on in their classroom, “so I can support and enrich their curriculum” (P5). Sometimes the support goes toward enriching “the love of reading. We support classroom teachers, pull books, and support the curriculum” (P12).

Experience has taught participants that collaboration is not all the same.

“You have to learn to appreciate different methods and strengths of collaboration. It is not always completely equal. Sometimes, one gives more than the other. Time must be spent on who is doing what piece and how that will look. It is like planning the planning” (P10).

Participant 4 said,

“As I spend more time as a librarian, I listen more to what other people need because I want to be there to support. I do not necessarily need to lead. I have a tendency to go in guns blazing, ‘Okay, here are the things we can do,’ and I do more listening now than I used to.”

Participants revealed that the required creditable classroom experience has made librarianship easier. Participant 2 said, “It is fortunate that I was a classroom teacher here, so I understand what is happening in the classroom. It would be a struggle if I did not have that background and experience.” Participants perceive collaboration as valuable. “There is never any bad outcome that comes from collaborating” (P1) even if the effort falls flat. “Collaborating encourages you to do more than you might be willing to do by yourself because you are breaking it apart. And this is more fun” (P9). As experience grows, “I want more collaboration than I did before. I value collaboration” (P1).

Theme 2: Culture of Collaboration

The AASL sets the expectation of a culture of collaboration, as does Strand 7 of the TSLAC/TEA standards. School librarians are expected to “establish and shape a culture of collaboration in the school community” (Coleman, 2020). Participants were asked to describe their perception of a culture of collaboration. Participants shared that the right culture must have people willing and open to ideas, who work collectively, and include everyone in the building. They also said that a collaborative culture needs support to thrive.

School librarian participants described a collaborative culture as one where people are willing to work together (P2, P6), open-minded (P3), and “not just go be in their little bubble (P4). A collaborative culture requires “openness and willingness to provide input and accept

feedback” (P5), and “to share ideas and willing also to receive ideas. We have to be willing to say, ‘Hey, maybe there’s another way to do it’” (P10).

“It’s the ability to say, ‘I don’t have all the answers, and I need help,’ or ‘I appreciate your input into this.’ Some people don’t have that. They are reluctant to share their knowledge. I saw that as a teacher, and I see that in the library now. It’s almost like having a good recipe for a pie, and they’ll give you everything but the main ingredient. We are all in this together. A good amount of vulnerability and humility comes from good collaboration, the vulnerability of it, the admission that you could use help from somebody makes it work” (P11).

Although school librarians promoted a collaboration culture, they said collaboration cannot happen alone. Classroom teachers must be involved in efforts to develop the culture. “You work collectively to develop a game plan,” said P7. Together, they can make it work for the campus and the population of students. Librarians can develop ideas and invite teachers who they think can support the idea: “If you have that as the culture, then collaboration flows more easily” (P3).

“You come up with an idea or a project, and then you make it so that it is all ours. You take ownership of it. If they buy into it, it will be a better outcome. No one person works in silos. We all need each other, and we have to support one another. We are in a partnership” (P7).

A collaborative culture involved all stakeholders. “Everybody is involved: stakeholders and our professionals have great insight into many things, and they are left out of the conversation” (P11). P11 also suggested bringing in the reading specialist or counselors. P8 expanded that list to include “the principal, assistant principals, the teachers, specialists, the

librarian, and other specialty teachers.” The culture means “having shared values and ownership of all the things that are going on in a building or school environment” (P9). A participant said you do not have to stop with the school building. Communicate with parents and community members, “This is who we are. This is our culture of working together. We’re a team. We’re a family” (P10).

Building a collaborative culture is “an ongoing process between all the stakeholders and all the pieces where you are willing to work together and learn from each other” (P9).

Participants cautioned that it doesn’t happen overnight. Creating a culture of collaboration takes years. “I think it’s very important to build the library program each year” (P1). It doesn’t happen instantly. You have to

“build from year to year. It takes that kind of mindset. It builds a school culture where people want to continue working there even if things get a little tough. They want to stay in that collaboration. I think everyone benefits” (P4).

A collaborative culture cannot happen unless the administration is supportive, “and has some buy-in and starts pushing it out” (P9). “Everything comes back to admin, because they dictate our schedules” (P3). “It comes from leadership trickling down” (P2). A collaborative culture can grow if the directive is “coming from the leadership from the top down and prioritizing time for us to be together and respecting that time: having encouragement from the principal” (P1).

The leadership of the principal has a direct effect on the library program. “Our school is so much into reading and working together because our principal was a reading specialist in the past” (P12). Leadership can “bring everyone to the table with a mutual respect that everyone has

something to contribute. If you don't provide that opportunity to everybody, then you are not really creating a culture of collaboration on campus" (P11) or "one of mutual respect" (P8).

"Admin always talks about having the enrichment teachers support what's happening in the classroom, and it's a constant talking point. We would love that. Give us help with that. But it is just a talking point" (P3). Administration could help build the collaborative culture by building in time for "open communication" (P8) and "making time to visit classrooms and see what other teachers are doing so that you are constantly getting new ideas" (P5).

Theme 3: Benefits of Collaboration

Participants were asked who benefits from a collaborative culture. "Everybody benefits" (P8, P9, P11). "Everyone on campus benefits when you can share and come up with the best possible ideas instead of just what you already have" (P5). Each group on campus benefits when librarians and classroom teachers collaborate.

Students "can take the information that we shared or researched with them and then apply it somewhere else" (P7). "Students are getting a richer learning experience" (P1) and "enriching activities" (P3). Students "are getting a lot of different resources when you collaborate than if they just got [instruction] in the classroom" (P6).

"If I can get that first collaboration opportunity, then the teachers see the benefits with their students who are more excited about their topic because they have these other examples than just a textbook or a passage. Teachers see more engagement with their kids" (P5).

"The skills are transferable skills. It's got to be something in that collaborative piece that is transferable so we can say, 'they get it.' Because that's what school is all about" (P7). Teachers "see that the kids are having fun, and they know they've learned something when the kids are

turning around and teaching other people. The kids also see that there's a group of people working together to make the very best situation for them" (P10).

Teachers benefit from collaboration with the school librarian. "They can see a lot more about what we do as librarians. Sometimes, they don't fully know that" (P6). "I went to teacher school many years ago and I don't recall [collaboration with the library] being the message. I remember talking about vertical alignment, but not about when it comes to resources and the library" (P11). It is beneficial to "learn new things yourself as a teacher and we're supposed to be lifelong learners" (P10). "Bringing in different people's strengths is a greater good than just working on your own. Teachers learn from our specific skills" (P1). "If the teacher allows and is willing, we can support their classrooms, lessons, and units" (P2).

Librarians benefit from collaborative partnerships because when "you have that relationship with the teacher, you feel a little bit more a part of what they are doing" (P6). "You feel like you belong in something, and you're making a difference instead of fighting against something" (P9).

"You get more of a sense of acceptance from the teacher that you're also a teacher. They treat you more as a colleague when they can see successful collaborations" (P6). "Our district office is trying to move towards collaboration because it makes the library more visible. They're want to make us more professional" (P7).

"As a librarian, you can benefit because you're learning from the teachers and you're getting their perspective and their unique view" (P1). "Even if you implement the lesson and the lesson flops, you still have created a connection with a human person that will probably last into another project" (P11). It is beneficial to "build relationships with teachers so that they feel comfortable coming to me for anything they need" (P5).

Theme 4: Drivers of Collaboration

Thirteen of the fourteen participants said that the librarian drives collaboration on campus. “It always defaults to the librarian because we know what our jobs are, and we know what we can offer” (P1). “My job is a mixture of content specialist, student/staff liaison, and information concierge” (P14). “The library really has to put themselves out there and say, ‘Hey, these are things I can offer you. Can I please come and work with you?’” (P4). “Teachers didn’t necessarily know that I was available to collaborate in the first place. I had to go to them” (P4). “We have to push in a lot. We have to be assertive for ourselves. We have to constantly ask, ‘How can I help you?’” (P11). “Teachers tend to forget about the library resources. They don’t have time to come to the library to find out” (P10).

“I’m pretty regularly reaching out and reminding them that I’m there and what resources I have available because their focus is on other things” (P5).

“I’m butting in and saying, ‘Hey, I think we have things in the library y’all might be able to use to help with X, Y, Z.’ I try to find the balance of not being super pushy but also trying to be helpful. That’s a hard balance” (P11).

“I’ve even asked my principal to allow us some time, like on a training day, so teachers can come and do a workshop, sit with our books, and plan because they don’t have time” (P10).

One participant said that “both the teachers and the librarian” drive collaboration together (P6). Participant 6 clarified that “it’s going to be coming from the enrichment teachers more than anybody.” Other teachers in the specials or enrichment rotation may have the same planning period schedules. Participant 9 said, “I think that there are the rare teachers who seek [collaboration] out and are aware of what kind of benefit that could be. But that number is dwindling. It just gets pushed aside these days.”

“Librarians lead from the middle, so we also have to seek that out and prioritize collaboration, even if it is not supported from the top” (P1). Librarians drive collaboration, but administration drives the culture of collaboration (P11, P6). “If your admin sends the message that collaboration is expected, it’s more likely to happen. So, it needs to start there. If the admin does not support that, they won’t provide the time, the opportunities, the respect for the need of that” (P10). Participant 5 shared, “Our principal and assistant principal are really good about meeting with teams regularly. Their mindset is what fuels that culture on campus.”

“Administrators start it, especially if they are attempting to have an actual professional learning community. Teachers have to pick it up and say, ‘I want to pursue these avenues where we get to know each other and work on things’” (P4). “The administrators are going to be the ones setting up those meetings and deciding who’s there and who’s not” (P11). Participant 4 said that if admin support wanes, but “teachers are on board and want it, then administrators may come out and say, ‘Okay, this is how we’re going to make this work’” (P4).

Research Question 2: How does a fixed schedule affect a culture of collaboration as perceived by a school librarian within a fixed rotation?

Participants were asked how a fixed schedule in ancillary rotation affected their ability to collaborate with classroom teachers. The researcher also sought information on how they work around the schedule's perceived effects on the culture of collaboration and their collaborative efforts. Table 2 lists the themes from the data and subthemes that further delineate the data.

Table 2*Research Question Two: Themes and Subthemes*

RQ 2 How does a fixed schedule affect a culture of collaboration as perceived by a school librarian within a fixed rotation?	
Theme	Subtheme
One: Isolation of Librarians	No Shared Planning Working in Silos Busy Teachers
Two: Constraints of Being on the Rotation	Constraints On Collaboration Constraints On Time Constraints On Scheduling
Three: Library Vibe of Fixed vs Flex Four: Making it Work	Build Relationships Shared Drives and Clouds Include other Specialists Librarians Lead and Support
Five: Communication	At Drop-off In Hallways Through Email and Cell Phones
Six: Benefits of Being on the Rotation	Consistency Time to Teach Know the Students Job Security

Theme 1: Isolation of Librarians

Not all people understand what the library and its professionals provide. “A lot of people think it’s only about checking in and checking out books. It’s not just scanning books” (P2).

“There’s a disconnect between what the library is and what it should be, and what it was. I know what it should be and what it’s like to be out of the rotation at the same campus” (P11). “I feel like teachers don’t necessarily know many of the things. And when they’re not in the library, they’re missing out on learning for themselves” (P9).

School librarians on the rotation schedule do not share planning periods with classroom teachers. Teachers meet with their teams during their planning periods and during professional development days as professional learning communities (PLC). “I get a little salty in libraries because I feel like we’re often left out of those conversations. We’re talking about PLCs. They have them all the time. I’m not there. I’m not invited. If I mention that I want to be a part of it, they’ll sometimes scoot me in, but you feel like an outsider” (P11). “Teachers have their PLC every so often, and they talked about it at the beginning of the year, ‘We’re going to get y’all in.’ No, they didn’t. There’s no way to do it” (P6).

“I never see the teachers anymore. They used to come during their ELA reading classes, and we would be in the same room and have those natural conversations about what was going on. It felt much more intentional to me” (P11). “We don’t work in silos, although librarians do work in silos a lot of times” (P7). “We don’t have a team on campus. We are always on our own. We don’t have any district-level support” (P1). “I feel like there are teachers who barely put a foot in the library and that’s such a sad thing” (P9).

Collaboration is “more difficult now in my role as a librarian than it was as a teacher because it isn’t built in. Even though I feel like I should be collaborating and augmenting the curriculum, I have less time, not no time, but less time to do it” (P5). “Teachers are less inclined to collaborate or want to collaborate because they are under a lot more stress and pressure for their time” (P6).

“We have classroom experience, as well. So, we know both sides of that partnership” (P1). “On the ancillary rotation, there is not much time for collaboration with me, my time, or the teacher’s time” (P8). ‘No matter how often I say, ‘let me know,’ everybody’s just got their own

thing going, and they're good with what they've got going" (P3). "I never see the teachers unless they're dropping off or picking up students" (P11).

Theme 2: Constraints on Being in the Rotation

Being on the ancillary rotation created constraints on the ability of the participants to do their work. The schedule placed constraints on their ability to collaborate. School librarians in the rotation cover the teacher's students while teachers have planning and PLC periods. Time to meet with peers to plan and teach together is affected by the fixed schedule.

"One of the biggest limitations is not being able to plan with the teachers, not being able to collaborate" (P6). "My inability to reach out to people. You're very tied down. So, whereas I used to go into classrooms a lot to help out, I just do not have that flexibility. I have classes coming in" (P11).

"With my 6-day rotation, I just do not get to see the kids that often. Teachers will say that the entire grade needs to do this lesson. It takes me six school days [or eight calendar days]. They will say, 'We're not spending six school days on this. Are you crazy?' That's what I have going" (P3).

"On the specials rotation, there are no open times for me to collaborate with teachers. I would have to either work with them before or after school. Or sit during my lunch if it overlaps with anybody. I don't have time during the day to collaborate with anyone" (P4). "If you are part of the enrichment, that's the teacher's planning time. So, it's like, I can't really move around for special events" (P6). "We don't ever have joint time where we can talk to each other because the teachers are not with their classes when they come in" (P1).

"I think I have lots of teachers who would love to collaborate with me, and I would love to collaborate with them, but we are never given time in the day to talk. It makes it very

challenging to meet up and make anything happen” (P3). “You don’t really have time to communicate as much with teachers. You don’t have time to have as many meetings with teachers when it’s convenient for them, short of staying after school. It’s the fixed rotation that makes that very difficult” (P10).

“In the ideal world, given the time to plan together would be one of the best things” (P6). “There’s no wiggle room. I don’t have the ability to say, ‘Yeah, just come on in, and we’ll fit you in here and get something done,’ because there’s no downtime” (P3). “I’m only able to meet one-on-one with teachers after school who have reached out” (P5).

“When teachers have their planning period, we have the kids. They have a PLC, and I’m teaching their kids during their PLC” (P1). “My teachers do vertical planning and collaboration, but it never involves ancillary. Somebody has to be watching the kids, and that’s us” (P3). “The time where the teachers could collaborate, their planning time, is when the kids are at enrichment. So, we never have that time to go see them because we’re teaching their kids” (P4).

Theme 3: Library Vibe of Fixed vs Flex

Many participants have worked on flexible schedules before being placed on a fixed rotating schedule. When Participant 4 took over the library after the librarian retired, she worked on upgrading the library programming to include shared planning. “By the time I got people to realize that things were different in the library, they put me on the fixed schedule, and now there’s just no time.” “You can get nothing done because you see classes all day long, every day. You can’t shelve books or order anything. You can’t do any special things because all you’re doing is covering classes” (9). “I can’t co-teach, I can’t plan. I have no planning time anymore because I have kids all day. Everything has been harder” (P1).

“I feel constricted in terms of what I do within that schedule. I’m still trying to figure all this out. When I was off the rotation, my interactions with students were much more meaningful. We did more book talks, library-specific things, and teacher-involved things because the teacher and I would do things together” (P11).

“Because I’ve had both a flexible schedule and a fixed schedule, I do see the benefits of both. I think that’s why a blended schedule is a little bit better, where you have fixed class times, but you can still have two hours somewhere in the day for flex scheduling or have open library time” (P5).

“This year, there’s been no co-teaching or co-planning at all. I don’t like it. I feel that everything has been less successful this year. I’ve worked twice as hard and had half the outcome” (P1).

“The fixed rotation is good because you see all the kids, but I prefer a mixed schedule. I like the mixed schedule because it frees me to do more with the teachers” (P3).

“I have a hard time grasping the positives of the fixed situation. To be fair, it could totally be a personal issue. I do feel a definite difference being on the rotation. I have to be way meaner and stricter than I used to be. And so that changes the whole vibe. I have library friends who have never been off the rotation. They really love it. So, I try to check myself because I think some of it is just knowing what it’s like on the other side and preferring that” (P11).

Theme 4: Making it Work

The fixed schedule may hinder participants, but they are determined to build relationships with the teachers to strengthen community and collaborative opportunities. The participants outlined ways to build relationships with teachers within their limited time during the day. Participants found that working with other professionals in the building, including the other

teachers in the ancillary rotation, provide opportunities to collaborate. Some use asynchronous learning objects to reach teachers and their students, while taking the lead and advocating for their library program.

“You have to be purposeful and strategic about finding ways to keep teachers informed, to collaborate with them, and build that relationship. It’s not an instant thing. I think it takes years and years to build it” (P9). Building relationships with teachers creates a bond of trust. Participant 13 holds a “book club with teachers to get to know them better. Those I know better come into the library and ask for help. It helps those who are on campus. It’s a process of starting over every year with the new teachers.” Another participant suggests eating with other teachers so you can “talk in the teacher’s lounge at lunchtime” (P6).

A shared drive can keep teachers and librarians connected. “Before I was on the schedule, I had access to the teachers’ curriculum” (P1). “I access the teacher lesson plans through our campus cloud. I try to support that in the library with my lessons” (P2). “Creating guides for teachers would be helpful. That could provide extra support for the new teachers, especially” (P10). “I do a newsletter at the beginning of the year, then I send emails the rest of the year. We have a Google Drive, and I have a recording of how to log into the catalog for students and teachers” (P13). Beyond technology, “Teachers have a mailbox in the workroom, and I put notes there. There is also a big bulletin board right before you get to the teacher’s workroom” (P12).

Classroom teachers are hard to schedule with so Participants 4, 6 and 9 plan joint lessons with the other members of the ancillary rotation.

“It works better if I work with the art teacher, the music teacher, or the computer/STEAM person. We try to work and plan things together all the time. I plan a bit with the music

teacher when it's getting close to the music shows they do. It is a little bit easier for us to do that" (P6).

Librarians take the lead and "reach out to the teachers, finding out what their curriculum is" (P8). "I check with the team leaders and ask, 'What are guys doing this week or next week?' Then I can work that way" (P1). "I do professional development with teachers at the beginning of the year. Last year we taught teachers about [the database] Teaching Books" (P13). "I could teach and work with teachers more. I doubt that all of them know how to use the catalog. A teacher gave me a list. She had five things to look up. She didn't look up anything on her own. She probably never used the catalog before" (P12).

Participant 7 said, "Our role is to support the teacher. We do whatever they ask us to do. Whatever my part is, whatever their part is, we make it happen." "I begin with printing out the TEKS and highlighting the standards that I might be able to hit upon in the library or in a collaborative lesson. Then I look at the district's scope and sequence to find the right time to introduce or review concepts taught in class" (P3). The most important thing is "having a strong relationship with the staff and the support of the administration" (P3).

Theme 5: Communication

Communication is paramount to building and keeping working relationships with classroom teachers. Participants described how they work in moments to communicate with classroom teachers, either face-to-face during student drop-off, passing in the hallway, or through email. Keeping the conversation going with other educators keeps the library central to partnership messaging.

"For successful collaboration, I find that communication is the best tool" (P7). "There has to be open communication and time for that communication. It can be done via email or in

person, or they can drop by. It's mutual respect" (P8). "I like talking to people, the more information, where it's like you are seeing what they're doing" (P11). "Personal conversation seems to work better than actually pushing out documents" (P11).

Conversations at drop-off can be informational. "The collaboration I get to do with my teachers comes from them telling me when they're dropping off the kids, 'We have this coming up next.' And then I get to keep bringing them augmentation materials, not just books, but all kinds of things they can use" (P5).

"I stand in the hall when they drop off their kids, 'Let me know what I can get for you.' Or 'I see your kids are talking about this. Can I supply something?' So, it's the only face-to-face there is since I am not out and about in the class area because I have people in the library" (P10).

Teachers do not always plan ahead. The librarians need to be flexible and adapt to the moment. Participant 6 explained,

"They bring and drop off their kids, and say, 'By the way, we're doing biography. So, if they could all find a biography, that would be great.' It's difficult because you are trying to get everything they need at the last minute. I think it is nice being able to plan it out, ensuring I have access to all the resources ahead of time. Meanwhile, I have to get my planned lesson in during that time" (P6).

A frequent setting for discussion is the hallway. There is "no time to sit down and actually work together. I see them in the hall, and we walk down the hallway so there's no formal documentation. So much walk and talk" (P3). Because "it's hard to meet formally, it's just a discussion with teachers, either in the hallways or after school, to give feedback on materials I've shared. I then can modify or adjust for future lessons" (P2).

“It's always just a conversation in the hallway or a quick email that they need something on this topic or to go with this lesson. I like to check in periodically and keep a helpful mindset. I just try to let the teachers know there's no “ask” that is too small. That is what I am here for” (P5).

Participants communicate with teachers via email (P12), “lots of emailing” (P13). “The tool I use the most is email to send teacher information about resources we have” (P10). The emails flow both ways, “Them emailing me or me emailing offers to work together” (P6).

“I would love to sit in team meetings and help teachers plan, but I am teaching during the day, so I depend on emails and texts. I send out weekly emails with resources for teachers and/or students. I share a monthly digital choice board and list of eBooks that support the monthly standards” (P3).

Participants 3, 8, and 11 send out emails to remind teachers of available resources and services in the library. “We do co-planning through email. Planning will start face-to-face, then we use our cell phones to call each other. We send pictures or images, especially of student products and outcomes” (P7).

Theme 6: Benefits of a Fixed Rotation

Participants stated that the fixed rotation schedule hindered collaborative efforts with classroom teachers. They were able to find benefits to the rotation. “We get consistent time with the kids. I know that I will see the kids on these days for sure, without question. Because if I don't see your class, they're with you, and you need that planning time” (P3). “It provides some consistency in that you are seeing the students for the maximum amount of time that you would be able to. They are going to drop the students off with you because now they're going to go to their planning” (P9). “The kids are consistently visiting the library. With a flex schedule, some

kids may never cross the threshold, or you have to work harder to pull them in. There is something about being able to capture them without fail every week: (P11). “The students are guaranteed their time, and I can plan my lessons for the times we have well ahead” (P5).

“It is nice to be able to teach a full lesson and have multiple things that happen through that time” (P4). “Because of that consistency piece, I can build on things more easily, using strategic and linear plans for what we will do” (P3).

“I love getting to teach lessons. I love knowing that the classes are coming regularly so that we can work on their skills. I can plan my lesson for the times that we have, well ahead. Knowing exactly when they’re coming, I can plan things in a logical order. I can scaffold their learning” (P5).

“I am getting to know the kids better, being on the rotation. I have them for longer” (P4). “I like that I see all the students regularly. I think it’s important because you form a relationship with the students. I enjoy it being my time with them” (P6).

“I love meeting and working with the children. I get to see them every time for 50 minutes. I really get to know them pretty well. That’s the part I love the most because I know them enough to make recommendations. I know them enough to support them in so many different ways” (P2).

“It benefits the school that they have more coverage. The only way for me to keep my position is to be on the schedule; to become a specialty teacher: (P1). “Job security is a big one” (P6). “I’m just fortunate to be here at this point” (P2). “Well, it’s not your choice. In December, my principal said, ‘I need to talk to you about something. I really want to put on the rotation.’ I couldn’t say no” (P4). “I love being a librarian” (P7).

Evaluation of the Outcomes

Research Question 1

Theme 1 *Collaborative Partnerships*

The study's problem centers on the barriers fixed library schedules create for collaborative partnerships and the resulting impact on a school's collaborative culture (Tallman, 2019). This theme illustrates that school librarians are well-prepared through their professional training to engage in deep collaborative practice, such as co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessing. Participants revealed a mismatch between their expectations and the realities of school culture. They have had to tailor their mindset to accept the problem of limited or nonexistent planning time with teachers due to rigid scheduling. This validates the findings of Kizziar (2021) that a gap exists between the roles defined by AASL (2018) and perceptions of principals and teachers about a librarian's place in curriculum development and instruction.

The findings demonstrate that school librarians uphold the intent of the AASL standards and Texas State guidelines by finding creative, relationship-driven ways to embed themselves in instructional planning and support. Participants' evolving definitions of collaboration of moving away from side-by-side planned partnerships to more fluid, support-based interactions, show how the standard's vision can be interpreted in diverse contexts.

Theme 2: *Culture of Collaboration*

This theme explores the necessary conditions for a collaborative school culture to thrive, including mutual respect, inclusion of all stakeholders, and strong administrative support (Winesburgh, 2023). The findings show that collaboration does not exist in isolation. It depends on a shared institutional belief in its value. Participants noted that a culture of openness, inclusivity, and administrative encouragement made collaborative practices more achievable,

even within the limitations of fixed schedules. These insights support the study's purpose by illuminating how collaboration is hindered yet how it can be nurtured.

Theme 3: *Benefits of Collaboration*

This theme highlights how collaborative partnerships enhance outcomes for all stakeholders: students, teachers, and school librarians (Frilot, 2023; Hurley, 2023; Pathier & Condon, 2023). These findings align with the study's purpose, which sought to identify the barriers to collaboration and its benefits and best practices. The examples of enriched learning, stronger teacher-librarian relationships, community (Kammer et al., 2021), and professional growth for both parties speak directly to the goal of fostering a collaborative culture despite ancillary scheduling constraints.

The findings reveal how collaborative practice shifts librarian-teacher dynamics from transactional support to mutual professional development, aligning with *Strand 7's* emphasis as an instructional partner. Theme 3 addresses the study problem by illustrating why overcoming scheduling barriers is critical and supports the study purpose by identifying how librarians create value through collaboration. When school librarians can engage in collaborative partnerships, the impact ripples across the school community.

Theme 4: *Drivers of Collaboration*

Theme 4 strengthens the understanding that while administrators may set the tone for the culture of collaboration on campus (Wake, 2022), librarians are often the driving force behind collaborative engagement. This speaks to the agency of librarians to lead from the middle, even when they are not formally empowered through the schedule. This theme reveals that librarians are proactive and strategic, often initiating and sustaining collaboration through persistence and relationship-building. This supports the study's purpose by identifying specific strategies

librarians use to overcome barriers: requesting planning time during professional development (Koh et al., 2022), advocating for workshops, maintaining regular outreach to teachers, and balancing persistence with approachability.

The conceptual framework is drawn from the AASL Standards, specifically the shared foundation of Collaborate, and Texas's school library guidelines, both promoting co-teaching, co-planning, and co-assessing as a measure of a strong school library program. The findings across all four themes underscore how the structural realities challenge these ideals, yet they are still attainable. Participants' reflections illustrate that collaboration remains possible through strategic relationship-building, cultural readiness, recognition of the beneficial impact, and individual initiative.

The findings extend the framework by identifying additional elements necessary for success that are not explicitly stated in the standards, such as librarian advocacy, trust, administrative modeling, and flexible communication strategies. These insights contribute new dimensions to how the AASL's *Collaborate* competency might be interpreted in schools where librarians are not on flexible schedules.

This study achieves its purpose by offering a nuanced, practice-informed understanding of how school librarians adapt to fulfill collaborative goals within the constraints of the ancillary rotation. Despite structural limitations, the findings illustrate how librarians cultivate informal, supportive partnerships that align with the core mission of enhancing student learning and engagement. These efforts demonstrate the multifaceted role of the school librarian—as information specialist, teacher, instructional leader, and program administrator—all of which position them to be effective and strategic collaborative partners (Andrew, 2020). Together, these

insights affirm that school librarians play a vital role in sustaining a collaborative culture, even in challenging scheduling environments.

Research Question 2

Theme 1: Isolation of Librarians

The findings presented in this theme address the problem and purpose of this study, offering insight into the barriers that inhibit the collaborative culture emphasized by the AASL and the Texas state standards. This theme confirms the problem by illustrating how librarians on the ancillary rotation are structurally excluded from key instructional and planning processes, such as grade-level PLCs and collaborative professional development. The participants' experiences underscore the disconnect between the ideal vision of the school library program and the reality of underutilized librarians being perceived as separate or non-instructional staff (Croft, 2022).

The data from Theme 1 highlights the very real limitations librarians face when not provided with shared planning time or regular interactions with teachers. While the themes supporting Research Question 1 explored ways librarians attempt to initiate and drive collaboration, this theme makes it clear that those efforts are frequently one-sided and insufficient without systemic support, leaving school librarians excluded (Wake, 2022). These experiences demonstrate that a lack of access, not a willingness, is the central barrier to collaboration.

Theme 2: Constraints on Being in the Rotation

The findings under this theme directly address the central problem of the study: that fixed library schedules significantly hinder collaborative partnerships between school librarians and classroom teachers (Tallman, 2019). Participants' testimonies strongly support this assertion, providing firsthand accounts of how the rotation physically and logistically prevents meaningful

collaboration. These findings reinforce and extend the problem statement and purpose by detailing the lived experience of librarians restricted by structural scheduling constraints.

Despite librarians' willingness to engage with colleagues, their physical immobility and lack of time during the day render proactive collaboration difficult. The study's purpose is highlighted by how the rotation eliminates the scheduling flexibility necessary for strategic instructional partnerships. As a result, school librarians struggle to engage in the full instructional lifecycle of planning, delivering, and assessing lessons in tandem with teachers despite their training and professional expectations (Koh et al., 2022). This undermines the AASL's call for shared leadership in instructional design and delivery as detailed in the *Collaborate* foundation.

Theme 3, *Library Vibe*

The qualitative data from Theme 3 confirms that fixed schedules reduce librarians to classroom coverage roles, transforming the library from a dynamic instructional partner into a static rotation stop. Participants explicitly stated that they have "no time" for planning (P1, P9), that "everything has been harder" (P1), and that the fixed model prevents even basic library tasks such as shelving books or ordering and processing resources. These accounts highlight the structural constraints that directly inhibit the library's capacity to contribute meaningfully to student learning through integrated instruction, aligning directly with the literature cited in the problem statement (Golden, 2020; Lewis, 2021).

The findings address the purpose of the study by illustrating how school librarians attempt to build collaborative cultures within and around these scheduling constraints. The contrast between fixed and flexible (or blended) scheduling emerges as a key variable affecting both instructional collaboration and librarians' emotional and professional satisfaction. The

participants described how a flexible or mixed schedule allowed for deeper collaboration with teachers and more meaningful student engagement, outcomes that mirror the benefits of collaboration identified in the conceptual framework (AALS, 2017; TEA, 2017).

Theme 3 also contributes an important emotional and cultural lens to the findings. Librarians' reflections about "missing out" on meaningful student interactions (P11) or feeling like they work "twice as hard with half the outcome" (P1) underscore how scheduling not only limits collaboration but also diminishes the professional identity and instructional presence of the school librarian. These findings validate and expand on the argument that fixed scheduling obstructs the culture of collaboration necessary for student success, as emphasized by Kammer et al. (2021) and Merga et al. (2021).

Theme 4, *Making It Work*

Theme 4 directly addresses the study's problem and purpose by showcasing the resourcefulness and strategic adaptability of school librarians operating under the constraints of fixed schedules. Participants demonstrated initiative in identifying alternative strategies to foster collaboration. This includes relationship-building activities, such as joining teachers for lunch or leading book clubs, and using asynchronous communication tools like newsletters, shared cloud drives, and instructional videos. These strategies align with the broader purpose of the study by identifying effective interventions and contributing to the existing literature, which has often noted barriers to collaboration but has less frequently explored how librarians in the rotation overcome them.

This theme contributes significantly to the conceptual framework, emphasizing the librarian's responsibility to create and sustain instructional partnerships (Keeling, 2023). The findings exemplify how librarians embody this principle, even when conditions are not ideal.

Through actions such as aligning lessons with classroom TEKS, proactively consulting scope and sequence documents, and co-planning with other ancillary staff, participants exemplify the metrics of collaboration detailed in TSLAC and TEA's Strand 7, especially co-teaching, co-planning, and co-assessing.

Cox (2023) advocated partnering with school counselors. Participants chose to collaborate with other enrichment teachers (art, music, STEAM), which illustrates how librarians creatively reinterpret collaboration when access to classroom teachers is limited. This cross-disciplinary collaboration highlights a previously under-examined opportunity within fixed-schedule contexts. It suggests that 'collaborative culture' can extend beyond traditional pairings, broadening the scope of inquiry for future studies.

These findings reinforce a central tenet of the conceptual framework: collaboration must be intentionally nurtured, particularly with institutional structure, such as fixed scheduling, which does not automatically facilitate it. The practical strategies revealed in this theme demonstrate that while a fixed schedule imposes significant constraints, it does not preclude collaboration, especially when librarians take the lead in relationship-building, content alignment, and instructional outreach.

Theme 5, *Communication*

Participants shared that communication, whether in brief hallway conversations, drop-off moments, or emails, is often spontaneous and informal. These moments are treated as vital opportunities to build and sustain relationships. This reflects an important adaptation in practice: while ideal collaboration would involve co-planning and co-assessment during shared time blocks, the reality for librarians on fixed schedules necessitates a more agile and creative approach.

This theme expands the conceptual framework by illustrating how the standards for collaboration can still be upheld, albeit in informal or asynchronous forms. Communication serves as a bridge through which school librarians uphold their professional responsibility to collaborate, despite structural constraints. Librarians who initiate emails, send newsletters, and create monthly choice boards are not passively waiting to be invited into instructional conversations. They actively shape those conversations, even when traditional planning models are unavailable. This aligns with the broader conceptual expectation that librarians lead from the middle and act as visible, proactive partners in student learning (Wong, 2021).

Theme 6, *Benefits of a Fixed Rotation*

These findings in this theme offer an important counterbalance to the primary problem this study aimed to address. While participants consistently described the fixed rotation as a constraint on collaboration, the nuanced insights presented in this theme show how school librarians can still identify and leverage meaningful benefits within these constraints. While fixed schedules limit traditional co-teaching opportunities, they simultaneously create reliable and structured learning environments for students. Librarians reframed the fixed rotation schedule as a condition that supports consistent teaching and student relationships. Participants noted that fixed rotation ensures regular access to students, facilitating structured, sequential instructional planning, which is crucial for scaffolding skills such as digital literacy, research, and inquiry.

A predictable schedule allows participants to design cohesive, tiered lesson series, building on students' prior knowledge and progressively developing their library and digital skills (Betts, 2023). Librarians can connect concepts across weekly topics and instructional units (Spiering & Lechtenberg, 2020). This strategic instructional planning aligns with TSLAC and

TEA standards, which promote robust, standards-aligned instruction from certified librarians. The ability to consistently work with all students ensures equitable access to library instruction, aligning with AASL's advocacy for inclusive, student-centered library programs.

Job security is relevant to the broader issue of sustaining school library programming in elementary schools. There is a decline in school libraries at the state and nationwide levels due to budget cuts (Morelan, 2024; Ahlfeld, 2019). Several participants expressed that being on the rotation may be the only way to justify and preserve their role with the school. While this reflects a compromise, it also demonstrates an important contextual reality: maintaining a presence, even if limited in collaborative scope, can protect the existence of a certified librarian in the building. School librarians do not push against inclusion in the rotation if it means losing their position. This indirectly contributes to the conceptual framework's emphasis on program sustainability and advocacy.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study provide practice-based insights into how fixed library schedules affect a school librarian's ability to engage in and cultivate a culture of collaboration. These implications are grounded directly in participants' lived experiences and should be interpreted within the bounds of those experiences. While the shared perspectives reflect the unique contexts of individual schools, they collectively highlight patterns that can inform collaborative planning and professional development for schools with flexible or mixed schedules. Understanding these insights can guide educational leaders in making structural adjustments that better support the collaborative roles of school librarians.

First, the findings confirm that while school librarians are well-prepared to engage in instructional partnerships, a fixed schedule's structural constraints limit their ability to fulfill the

collaborative roles outlined in professional standards outlined by the AASL and TSLAC/TEA. The gap between professional expectations and scheduling realities reinforces previous research indicating that librarians are often excluded from instructional planning and decision-making processes (Golden, 2020; Lewis, 2021; Kissiar, 2021).

Second, the data revealed that, while constrained, collaboration is possible within fixed schedules. Participants demonstrated initiative by adapting their interpretations of collaboration through informal communication, relationship-building, and creative workarounds. Participants recommended partnering with ancillary teachers or providing asynchronous support through digital learning objects and online platforms. These practices suggest that collaboration can be fluid and adaptive rather than dependent solely on traditional planning models.

Third, while fixed schedules hinder collaboration with classroom teachers, they also offer benefits, such as regular student contact, consistency for lesson planning, and job security. These insights proved a more nuanced understanding of the fixed schedule, showing it as both a barrier and a structure that can be leveraged strategically.

Finally, the findings extend the conceptual framework by identifying components not explicitly addressed in AASL or state standards: the importance of librarian visibility, the necessity of administrative collaboration modeling, and the value of interpersonal trust. These factors, although intangible, are crucial to fostering collaborative partnerships and cultivating a sustainable culture of collaboration. Based on the study's findings, several practical recommendations can be made for school leaders, policy makers, and school librarians to strengthen collaborative practices in schools with fixed library schedules.

Increase Administrative Support and Modeling

School administrators play a critical role in cultivating a collaborative culture. It is recommended that principals include librarians in PLCs, professional development sessions, and curriculum planning meetings (Lewis, 2021; Wake, 2022). Even small, symbolic inclusions can signal the librarian's value as an instructional partner and reduce the librarian's perceptions of isolation.

Advocate for Flexible or Blended Scheduling Models

Complete schedule overhauls may not be feasible in all contexts. Schools should consider adopting blended models that allow for some open time blocks. This would enable librarians to co-plan and co-teach without sacrificing the consistency of student instruction (Sturge, 2019).

Provide Intentional Time for Collaboration

Designating specific times during the year (e.g., early-release days, PD days) for collaborative planning with librarians should be a professional norm (Tallman, 2019). This recommendation aligns with the standards' emphasis on co-planning and supports librarians in fulfilling their instructional role. Co-planned lessons could be taught during the rotation and co-assessed by both.

Support Cross-disciplinary Collaboration

Collaboration with ancillary teachers, such as art, music, and STEAM, can be leveraged more intentionally (Gilstrap, 2019; Himmelstein, 2019; Cox, 2023). This allows librarians to integrate literacy and inquiry skills into broader learning experiences while respecting the constraints of fixed rotations. The librarian and other ancillary teachers working toward common goals reduce the feeling of isolation for each member of the partnership.

Encourage Asynchronous Communication Tools

Librarians should continue using digital tools, such as shared drives, newsletters, and instructional videos, to maintain communication with teachers and support instruction (Kapanka, 2021). Asynchronous learning objects can be utilized to directly support student instruction and provide professional development. School leadership should recognize these as valid forms of collaboration and allocate time and resources to support them.

Foster a Culture of Visibility and Advocacy

School librarians should be encouraged to make their contributions to student learning visible through data, displays, or newsletters to advocate for their instructional role (Ahlfeld, 2019; Wong, 2021). Building relationships with staff through informal means (e.g., lunch, book clubs) strengthens trust and opens the door to future collaboration. School leadership should support such endeavors in their communications to staff and community.

Reframe Job Security as Advocacy

While job security was a noted benefit of fixed scheduling, it should not be the sole justification for the librarian's role in the ancillary rotation. Librarians should be supported in advocating for their instructional value and collaborating to fulfill their professional standards and school goals. Strong library programs have a significant impact on student learning and test scores (Morelan, 2024).

Professional Development for Teachers

Teachers often have limited awareness of how librarians can support instruction. Offering librarian-led workshops at the beginning of the year or during staff meetings can help increase awareness and lay the foundation for collaboration (Kizziar, 2021). Including librarians in professional development can increase visibility of their instructional value.

These implications and recommendations, grounded in qualitative data, highlight both the challenges and opportunities faced by school librarians working within the constraints of fixed schedules. They offer actionable strategies for educators and administrators to foster more inclusive and collaborative school environments that reflect the goals of national and state school library standards. School librarians possess the knowledge, training, and adaptability to support classroom teachers while adjusting their collaborative practices to meet the school community's needs.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was centered on the voices and perceptions of school librarians on the fixed schedule rotation. Future researchers could explore library collaboration from the perspectives of teachers and administrators. Researchers could gain a fuller picture of collaborative culture. Understanding the perceptions and priorities of those with scheduling and instructional decision-making power could clarify the disconnect between librarian expectations and their experience with school practices. This would expand the understanding of systemic barriers to collaboration and help develop more targeted solutions.

While this qualitative study described spontaneous and informal collaboration (e.g., hallway chats, email exchanges, text messages), a future mixed methods approach could help quantify the frequency and instructional impact of these interactions. Incorporating student outcome data, such as assessments or project quality, would strengthen the evidence base by linking perceived collaborative benefits to measurable academic gains. Researchers could also apply network analysis or social mapping tools to visualize librarian-teacher collaboration patterns and identify areas for growth.

Participants in this study described productive partnerships with fellow ancillary educators (e.g., art, music, STEAM). Future studies could examine the nature and outcomes of these cross-specialty collaborations in greater depth. Comparative case study designs across varying school types (urban, suburban, rural) would enable an analysis of how different demographics and policy contexts shape these partnerships.

This study was limited to elementary schools in a large urban county in Texas. Broader sampling, including rural and suburban areas, could enhance the generalizability of the findings and help determine whether these experiences are unique to large districts or represent a national trend. Researchers might also consider longitudinal designs to observe how collaborative practices evolve under fixed or blended scheduling models.

This study has identified barriers and highlighted adaptive strategies. The next step is to transition from advocacy to action by shifting the focus to applied research that tests concrete solutions in the field. Researchers could design experimental or quasi-experimental studies to evaluate the impact of interventions, such as blended scheduling models that incorporate both fixed library time and flexible blocks for co-planning and co-teaching.

Professional development interventions could also be designed and tested, such as librarian-led training for teachers on collaboration strategies or administrative workshops promoting inclusive planning practices. Additionally, researchers might develop and assess asynchronous collaboration toolkits, including digital planning templates, cloud-based communication platforms, and co-teaching guides, to facilitate instructional design in the absence of shared planning time.

Future researchers can build on this study by conducting another qualitative case study, expanding stakeholder perspectives, comparing teacher perceptions of scheduling models, and

examining the relationship between collaboration and student outcomes. Improvements should include broader sampling, more data sources, and longitudinal tracking. These directions will strengthen the research base and offer actionable strategies for supporting more equitable, effective, and instructionally rich collaborative practices in school libraries, especially within the constraints of fixed schedules.

Conclusions

This study explored how school librarians operating within the constraints of a fixed schedule experience and sustain a collaborative culture in their schools. The study responded to a clear and ongoing problem in practice: being on a fixed rotation schedule often prevents school librarians from participating fully in collaborative teaching partnerships. National and Texas State standards both emphasize collaborative partnerships and a foundational element of the role of a school librarian. Through the voices of practicing librarians, this research offers a grounded and realistic portrait of the obstacles they face and the strategies they use to uphold their instructional responsibilities.

The findings make it clear that the model of fixed scheduling poses a significant challenge to building a collaborative culture. The study also offers a critical insight for practice. Collaboration, while limited, is not impossible. School librarians are finding ways to work with their colleagues through informal communication, cross-disciplinary partnerships, and productive uses of asynchronous tools. These adaptations to the professional standard of collaboration reflect a broader truth: where institutional flexibility is lacking, a school librarian can still drive relationship-building that can yield meaningful partnerships with teachers.

The study has several implications for school leaders and policymakers. First, the school librarian's role as an instructional partner must be more intentionally supported through

administrative modeling, access to planning opportunities, and acknowledgment of non-traditional collaboration. Second, flexible or mixed scheduling models, though difficult to implement when coverage for teacher planning periods is needed, hold promise for increasing the visibility and instructional reach of the librarian. Finally, professional development efforts for both librarians and teachers should emphasize the instructional value of school librarians and how their information literacy expertise can enrich curriculum and student engagement.

The central message of this study is not just that fixed schedules limit instructional collaboration. School librarians are essential educators whose contributions to student learning are too valuable to be sidelined by scheduling logistics. School librarians are trained, ready, and capable partners in instruction who need support from administrators to fulfill their professional role.

Practice recommendations include incorporating librarians into PLCs and planning time, encouraging asynchronous planning tools, and developing targeted professional development learning around collaborative teaching. Recommendations for future research point to the need for broader perspectives, such as those of teachers and administrators, and for applied studies that measure the impact of information and cross-disciplinary collaboration on student learning.

This study shows a group of professionals striving to fulfill their professional and instructional roles under limiting conditions. It calls for a shift from understanding the collaboration barriers to testing solutions for productive partnerships. If school leaders are serious about cultivating an authentic culture of collaboration, they must include librarians in the conversation, not as an afterthought, but as essential instructional partners.

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Appendix A Interview Protocol



National University IRB

9338 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
 irb@nu.edu

Interview Protocol

Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. My name is Janice Anderson, and I am a doctoral student at Northcentral University conducting my dissertation research.

This interview is expected to last 30 minutes. I will record our discussion and take notes to ensure I have complete information. Your responses will be held in confidence.

I want to review the consent letter with you before we begin the interview.

Did you receive the consent form I emailed? Participant: Yes _____ or No _____

Did you have time to review the consent form? Participant: Yes _____ or No _____

Do you have any questions about the research or form? Participant: Yes ___ or No ___

Do you consent to participate in this research? Participant: Yes _____ or No _____

Lead into the Interview: Thank you. I am interested in gaining knowledge of effective collaboration practices among elementary school librarians in fixed enrichment rotations. This information will be confidential, and your answers will not be shared with anyone. Your perspectives and experiences are important to understanding the reality of collaborating with classroom teachers while working in the specials or ancillary rotation.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Collaboration:

- How would you define collaboration, and has that definition changed with time and experience?
- Who drives collaboration between school librarians and classroom teachers?

Collaborative culture:

- How would you describe a collaborative culture?
- Who drives a collaborative culture on campus? How?
- Who benefits from collaborative partnerships?

Collaboration Documentation:

- What instruments, templates, or lesson plan format do you use for the following collaborative steps:
 - Co-planning
 - Co-teaching
 - Co-assessing

Strategies:

- How do you know if a collaboration has been successful?
- What strategies do you use for successful collaboration?

Fixed rotation schedules:

- What benefits are there to being in a fixed rotation?
- What limitations are there to being in a fixed rotation?
- How does a fixed rotation affect collaboration with classroom teachers?
- Do you want to share anything about your experiences as a school librarian in a fixed rotation schedule?

Debriefing questions:

- Do you have any questions or concerns?
- Is there anything you would like to add or clarify?

Conclusion: Thank you for taking the time to visit with me and sharing your experience with collaboration while working in the special rotation. I will listen to the recording and transcribe the interview. I will send you a transcript for your review to ensure I have transcribed your words accurately. Thank you again for sharing your experiences with me.

Appendix B

Letter to Principal Requesting Support



National University IRB
 9338 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
 irb@nu.edu

Dear _____,

I request permission to conduct a research case study with your school librarian. I am enrolled in the Doctor of Education program at Sanford College of Education, National University. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting a case study to determine how school librarians collaborate with classroom teachers. The title of this project is *Collaborative Partnerships with School Librarians in Fixed Rotation: A Qualitative Study*. Dr. David Thomas is my dissertation advisor.

Through this study, I seek to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1 How do school librarians within a fixed schedule perceive a culture of collaboration and collaborative partnerships?
- RQ2 To what extent does a fixed schedule affect a culture of collaboration as perceived by a school librarian within a fixed rotation?

Permission to contact the school librarian at your school and perform virtual interviews with them after hours is requested. School librarians chosen for the research must have at least two years of classroom teaching experience, a master's degree, and a TEA School Librarian teaching certificate. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. The participating school librarian will finish the interview by _____.

Before the interview, the school librarian will be given an informed consent form. The participant may withdraw from the research study at any time. Identifying information (name,

school, school district, city) will remain confidential and not be included in the dissertation. Data will only be used to fulfill the dissertation, which will be presented to the faculty of National University in partial fulfillment of the criteria for the degree of Doctor of Education. Students will not be used as participants.

The researcher will make certain that

- Participants will have access to the interview protocol and informed consent form. They will be notified of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time.
- Personal data will be kept private and not included in the dissertation.
- Documentation will be used to fulfill the dissertation, which will be presented to the faculty of National University in partial fulfillment of the criteria for the Doctor of Education degree.
- Students will not be used as participants.

You may contact me by phone at 713-515-9145 or email at Janice_anderson@yahoo.com.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Janice L. Anderson
Doctoral Student
National University

Appendix C Consent Form for Focus Group



National University IRB

9338 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

Consent Form for Focus Group

My name is Janice Anderson, and I am a doctoral student at National University (NU). I also serve as a school librarian at River Oaks Elementary, Houston ISD, Houston, TX.

I am asking you to take part in a research study about the factors that enable school librarians to build a culture of collaboration with other educators while in the ancillary rotation. The name of this research is “Collaborative Partnerships with School Librarians in Fixed Rotation: A Qualitative Study.”

You may participate in this research if you meet all the following criteria:

1. An elementary school librarian in Texas,
2. In a fixed, ancillary, enrichment, or specials rotation schedule,
3. Hold a master’s degree in School Library and Information Science or equivalent degree and
4. Hold a School Librarian certificate issued by the state of Texas.

I hope to include twenty people in this research and 10 of those in a focus group.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What you will be asked to do: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

- Participate in a focus group via the online conferencing application Riverside.FM for 60 minutes.
- Review the focus group transcript via email for 10-15 minutes.

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

- Your experience in collaborative partnerships with classroom teachers.
- Your experience in a fixed schedule rotation and how it influences collaboration with other teachers.

Risks: There are minimal foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research. You can skip any question you do not wish to answer, skip any activity, or stop participation at any time.

Benefits: If you participate, there are no direct benefits to you. This research may increase the body of knowledge in the subject area of this research.

Recording: I would like to audio/video record your responses during the Zoom interview.

Mandated Reporting: My professional role outside of NU requires me to report suspicion of child or elderly abuse, suspicion of harm to self or others, and committed crimes to the appropriate authorities.

Confidentiality: I will keep the records of this study private and take reasonable measures to protect the security of all your personal information by removing recordings from cloud-based storage to local drives. In any report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you.

Taking part is voluntary: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may quit at any time.

If you have questions: Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, contact me at Janice_anderson@yahoo.com or 713-515-9145.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) via email at irb@nu.edu

Appendix D Email Invitation to Participate



National University IRB

9338 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
 irb@nu.edu

Email Invitation to Participate

My name is Janice Anderson, and I am a doctoral student at Northcentral University. I am conducting a research study about the factors that enable school librarians to build a culture of collaboration with other educators while in the ancillary rotation. The name of this research is “Collaborative Partnerships with School Librarians in Fixed Rotation: A Qualitative Study.

I am recruiting individuals who meet all these criteria:

- An elementary school librarian in Texas,
- In a fixed, ancillary, enrichment, or specials rotation schedule,
- Hold a master’s degree in School Library and Information Science or equivalent degree and
- Hold a School Librarian certificate issued by the state of Texas.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

- Participate in an online interview via Riversie.FM for 30 minutes.
- Review the interview summary via email for 10-15 minutes.

During this interview, you will be asked questions about:

- Your experience in collaborative partnerships with classroom teachers.
- Your experience with a fixed schedule rotation and how it influences collaboration with other teachers.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at Janice_anderson@yahoo.com.

Thank you for considering participating in this voluntary research.

Janice Anderson
 10756 Briar Forest Drive
 Houston, TX 77042

Appendix E Focus Group Protocol



National University IRB
 9338 Lightwave Ave., San Diego, CA 92123
 irb@nu.edu

Focus Group Protocol

Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group today. My name is Janice Anderson, and I am a doctoral student at Northcentral University conducting my dissertation research.

This focus group is expected to last 60 minutes. I will record our discussion and take notes to ensure I have complete information. Your responses will be held in confidence.

I want to review the consent letter before we begin the discussion.

Did you receive the consent form I emailed? Participant: Yes _____ or No _____

Did you have time to review the consent form? Participant: Yes _____ or No _____

Do you have any questions about the research or the consent form? Yes ____ or No ____

Do you consent to participate in this research? Participant: Yes _____ or No _____

Lead into the Interview: Thank you. I am interested in gaining knowledge of effective collaboration practices among elementary school librarians in fixed enrichment rotations. This information will be confidential, and your answers will not be shared with anyone beyond this group. Your perspectives and experiences are important to understanding the reality of collaborating with classroom teachers, especially while working in the specials or ancillary rotation.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

- What drives your desire to collaborate with classroom teachers?

- What are your key strategies for successful collaboration?
- If you are unable to collaborate, what are other strategies to connect with classroom teachers?

Debriefing questions:

- Do you have any questions or concerns?
- Is there anything you would like to add or clarify?
- Do you want to share anything about your experiences as a school librarian in a fixed rotation schedule?

Conclusion: Thank you for taking the time to visit with me and sharing your experience with collaboration while working in the specials rotation. I will listen to the recording and transcribe the interview. I will send you a transcript for your review to ensure I have transcribed your words accurately. Thank you again for sharing your experiences with me.