

*Is Flexible Scheduling Always the Answer?  
Some Surprising Results from a National  
Study* [tallman]

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## **Introduction**

Library media specialists are frequently reminded of the importance of performing the consulting and teaching roles described in *Information Power*. Yet, they wonder how to find time to participate in the consultation and instructional roles in addition to the management and increasing technology responsibilities of their positions. If these roles are crucial to improving teaching and learning, then what factors influence the ability of the library media specialist to participate as a partner with classroom teachers in instructional design and development, and in teaching?

This project, sponsored through a research grant from the American Association of School Librarians and the Highsmith Corporation, focused on curriculum integration of the library media program as evidenced by consulting between the teacher(s) and the library media specialist and by the teaching of information skills in association with classroom instruction. To perform the consulting and information

skills teaching roles as described in *Information Power*, the library media program must be closely connected to the classroom program. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between several variables that could potentially influence the planning and curriculum connection between classroom and library media program. Of primary interest was scheduling type (i.e., flexible or fixed scheduling of classes for library media instruction), but other factors were investigated as well.

A random sample of 1,500 names of elementary school library media specialists was requested from Market Data Retrieval, Inc. These potential participants were invited to join the study, but their school needed to include at least three grades, including either grade three or grade four. This criterion would eliminate middle schools and K-196>2 schools where organizational structure might create a very different environment for the library media specialist's involvement with classroom teachers. Five hundred two respondents met the

*criterion for inclusion and agreed to participate. Three hundred ninety-seven actually returned questionnaires, for a return rate of 79 percent. Two outliers were eliminated from the analysis. Seventeen responses had incomplete data. In addition, sixteen other returned questionnaires were unusable.*

*Participants received a questionnaire that included a chart on which they listed the names of classroom instructional units in which they had participated either as a curriculum consultant or as a teacher. Data were collected for the six-week period from October 4, 1993 to November 12, 1993. For each unit, the respondent indicated which of the following five curriculum consultation tasks and two instructional tasks were performed for the unit. The five curriculum consultation tasks for this study were:*

- identifying and gathering materials for a classroom unit (GATHER),*
- collaborating with the teacher in the design of classroom unit objectives (IDENTIFY),*

- *collaborating with the teacher in the design of teaching/learning activities (PLAN),*
- *teaching the unit collaboratively with the teacher (TEACH), and*
- *collaborating with the teacher in evaluating the unit (EVALUATE).*

*The two instructional tasks were:*

- *teaching information skills (SKILLS), and*
- *assessing student work (ASSESS).*

*To prevent confusion in term definitions, the researchers included a glossary with the questionnaire.*

### ***Major Findings***

***Scheduling.** The term flexible scheduling has many working definitions within the profession. For the purpose of this study, flexible scheduling is the method of scheduling instructional class time in the library media center based on the library media specialist and*

*teacher(s) planning together for instruction or use of resources based on student learning needs within a curriculum unit. The schedule varies constantly. Fixed scheduling is the method of scheduling class time in the library media center for instruction or use of resources on a regular basis (usually weekly). Some library media specialists reported that they had a combination of both types of scheduling; for some classes, they met with students on a regularly scheduled basis, while for others they met with students on a flexible basis, dependent upon teaching/learning needs. These were classified as mixed schedules in the study.*

*Responding library media specialists reported significantly more instances of performing all five consultation tasks in schools employing flexible or mixed (i.e., some flexible and some fixed) scheduling compared to schools employing fixed schedules.<sup>2</sup>*

***Planning Culture.** The climate for planning in a school is critical for*

the curriculum consultation role of the library media specialist.

Based on the results of previous research,<sup>2</sup> this study investigated the effect of support from the principal in expecting collaborative planning between teachers and the library media specialist. Those library media specialists who reported that their principals held expectations for collaboration between the library media specialist and classroom teachers reported that, in fact, more consultation between library media specialists and teachers occurred than in those settings where the principal did not set such expectations. Combining either flexible or mixed scheduling with the principals' expectations for team planning between teachers and library media specialists produced the highest amount of activity in the five tasks.

Another aspect of the school culture was whether teachers tended to plan as teams or individuals. Those library media specialists who met with teachers as teams had significantly higher occurrences of all five curriculum consultation tasks than those who met with teachers

*individually or not at all.*

*How many times a library media specialist met with teachers for planning related to a given unit was examined. In 63 percent of the units reported, library media specialists and teachers met only once for planning a given unit. The collaborative planning was also examined for how long each planning session lasted. Those library media specialists using flexible schedules were found to devote substantially more time to the collaborative planning process than those with fixed schedules.*

### *Full-Time/Part-Time Status of the Library Media Specialist*

*Full-time library media specialists reported significantly more gathering of materials, identifying objectives for instruction, and planning instructional activities than did part-time library media specialists serving a single building when flexible scheduling was in place.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that flexible scheduling may be particularly*



appropriate when full-time library media professionals are available. Such differences were not found in comparing full- and part-time library media specialists working in a single building and employing fixed or mixed scheduling. Among the full-time respondents, those with flexible schedules performed significantly more consultation and teaching tasks than those with fixed schedules.

### *Collaborative Units*

Library media specialists employing fixed schedules described 22 percent of reported units as being collaboratively planned.<sup>4</sup> Library media specialists employing a flexible schedule identified 62 percent of their units as being collaboratively planned. Collaboration and flexible scheduling appeared to complement of each other.

### *Multiple-Content Unit Participation*

Participants reported the content areas of the units they listed. While often the units were related to a single discipline, many units were

*reported to relate to more than one discipline. Library media specialists who consulted with teachers on at least one multiple-content-area unit reported participating in almost twice the number of units during the six weeks of the study than library media specialists who reported only single-content-area units. Library media specialists who reported working in multidisciplinary units exhibited a substantial difference as compared to those who reported working only in single-discipline units. For them, scheduling type, planning style, and expectations to provide library time for teacher planning time did not significantly influence activity levels in unit planning. However, the principal's expectation for team planning between teachers and the library media specialist was the one factor that did significantly influence activity levels among library media specialists in this group. Those who had the principal's support reported almost four units more than those who did not have the principal's support for planning.*

### *The Teaching Role*

Library media specialists were asked to identify those units for which they taught information skills in association with the classroom instruction. Analysis of the data showed that library media specialists with mixed scheduling taught significantly more information skills lessons in connection with classroom instructional units than those with flexible or fixed schedules.

Participants reported whether or not they had played a role in the assessment of student work in the instructional units that they reported. Over half the respondents reported that they did not participate in student assessment. Those who met with teaching teams, however, reported significantly more involvement in assessment of student work than those who met with teachers individually or those who reported no meeting with teachers. Still, the overall level of reported involvement in assessment was minimal

### *Conclusions*

In most cases, the results of this study suggest that flexible scheduling improves the likelihood of curriculum consultation by the library media specialist. The importance of the principal having expectations for collaboration between teachers and the library media specialist is evidenced in the findings that more consultative interaction was reported when such expectations existed. Also, settings where teachers tended to plan as teams were found to be more conducive to library media specialists implementing the consulting role.

In the comparison between settings featuring multidisciplinary units and those featuring single-discipline units, the findings for those involved in single-discipline units support the importance of library media specialists planning with teams of teachers. Library media specialists participating in multiple-content-area units seemed to be in a special situation. They were almost twice as active in curriculum consultation as library media specialists who reported

*single-content area units exclusively. This may suggest that these library media specialists were in settings where cross-disciplinary teaching and commitment to collaboration characterized their schools.*

*The researchers offer the following generalizations for consideration:*

- Principals who expected teacher/library media specialist collaboration had media programs that were more than ancillary. This underscored the importance of principals having an understanding of the benefits of collaboration between teachers and library media specialists.*
- The time media specialists spent in meeting with teachers led to more extensive involvement within curriculum units.*
- Library media specialists meeting with teams of teachers yielded more curriculum involvement than meeting with teachers individually. Perhaps the teachers who work in teams are already disposed toward collaboration, and so working with the library media specialist is*

*natural.*

- More consultation activity was reported from schools characterized by flexible or mixed scheduling than from those characterized by fixed scheduling.*
- If flexible scheduling was employed, significant differences in consultation occurred between full-time library media specialists and part-time ones, but these differences were not evident in fixed- or mixed-scheduling sites.*

*Perhaps the best scenario for implementation of the consultation and teaching roles defined in Information Power includes flexible scheduling and a full-time library media specialist who meets with teams of teachers to plan for instruction, whose principal has expectations for teacher-library media specialist collaboration, and who work with multiple-content-area units.*

*For a more complete discussion of this study, see School Library Media*

*SLMA 1995/pt2-ch26.ed/p. 15*

*Quarterly (fall 1994).*

*Notes*

1. Jean Donham van Deusen and Julie Tallman van Deusen, "The Impact of Scheduling on Curriculum Consultation and Information Skills Instruction," *School Library Media Quarterly* 23/1 (fall 1994): 17-25.

2. Jean Donham van Deusen, "Effects of Fixed Versus Flexible Scheduling on Curriculum Involvement and Skills Integration in Elementary School Library Media Centers," *School Library Media Quarterly* 21/3 (spring 1993): 173-82.

3. Julie Tallman and Jean Donham van Deusen, "External Conditions As They Relate to Curriculum Consultation and Information Skills Instruction by School Library Media Specialists,"

*SLMA 1995/pt2-ch26.ed/p. 16*

*School Library Media Quarterly 23/1 (fall 1994): 27-31.*

4. Julie Tallman and Jean Donham van Deusen, "Collaborative Unit Planning: Schedule, Time and Participants," *School Library Media Quarterly 23/1 (fall 1994): 33-37.*