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## Construction of Professional Identity in Novice Library Media Specialists

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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, CONSTRUCTION OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN NOVICE LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS, by DEBORAH W. SANDFORD, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representative of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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## ABSTRACT

### CONSTRUCTION OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN NOVICE LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS

by  
Deborah W. Sandford

The roles of the person who works in a school library, as well as their title - librarian, teacher-librarian, library teacher, library media specialist, school librarian, library media teacher - have undergone countless revisions since the first official school libraries opened their doors in the early 1900s. Although school library media specialists (LMSs) have struggled to negotiate their identities in public K12 education for decades, this “identity crisis” seems to have reached a critical point due to changes in U.S. learning environments brought about by federal legislation, the implementation of standards-based teaching, the emphasis on standardized criterion referenced testing, and the proliferation and ubiquitous use of computers and the Internet as information sources. Although teacher identity has been thoroughly studied, the ways in which LMSs describe themselves in their professional role and how their identities change from pre-service to in-service are rarely investigated. Using Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain’s (1998) theory of identity and their concept of *figured worlds* as a framework, this study explores how four novice LMSs negotiated the identities made available to them in the figured worlds of their public K12 school environments.

The following questions guided the study:

1. How do novice library media specialists describe their professional identities?

- a. How does personal history inform the construction of professional identity of novice library media specialists?
- b. How do novice library media specialists negotiate identity within the figured worlds of public K12 schools?

The four participants were first year LMSs recruited from a large urban school district in the southeastern United States. Data collection took place over the course of the 2011-2012 school year and included in-depth interviews, document analysis, journal responses, and observations. Findings indicate that the figured worlds in which novice library media practitioners begin their careers are often shaped by the experiences that faculty, administrators, and students have had with previous LMSs and bear significant influence on the identities afforded new LMSs as well as their own experiences with LMSs prior to their preparation programs.

CONSTRUCTION OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN NOVICE LIBRARY MEDIA  
SPECIALISTS

by  
Deborah W. Sandford

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the  
Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Instructional Technology  
in  
the Department of Middle-Secondary Education and Instructional Technology  
in  
the College of Education  
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Atlanta, Georgia  
2013

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AASL	American Association of School Librarians
AECT	Association of Educational Communications and Technology
ALA	American Library Association
AMO	Annual Measurable Objective
AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
AP	Assistant Principal
CBAM	Concerns Based Adoption Model
CTSS	Certified Technology Support Specialist
ELL	English Language Learners
ESOL	English to Speakers of other Languages
GAMA	Georgia Association of Media Assistants
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ISTE	International Society for Technology in Education
LIS	Library Information Science
LMC	Library Media Center
LMS	Library Media Specialist
NBPTS	National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
NCATE	National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
SLMS	School Library Media Specialist
SRO	School Resource Officer

## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

*Sunrise Elementary School had a BIG problem. The new librarian, Miss Lotta Scales, was a **real dragon**. Miss Lotta Scales was hired to guard the Library. And she took her job seriously.....*

Carmen Agra Deedy  
*The Library Dragon, pp. 1-2*

Stereotyped images of humorless, shushing lipped, stern, pince-nez and bun sporting matrons have plagued librarians for years. Portrayals of librarians in books, television, film, comic strips and cartoons have created enduring images that inevitably contribute to the *figured* (D. Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998) identities of librarians. The school library media profession, however, is experiencing an identity crisis that has grown substantially outside the boundaries of battling that stereotype. Miss Lotta Scales, the library dragon in Carmen Deedy's award-winning picture book, is an old school guardian of the books who makes the identity-changing discovery that children can actually handle books without ruining them. The kid-friendly, story-reading Miss Lotty, who emerges at the end of the book, is certainly a more pleasant character than Lotta Scales. Unfortunately, Miss Lotty is, in fact, another stereotype: a manifestation of a character with which many who inhabit the *figured world* (D. Holland, et al., 1998) of K12 education (including new school librarians) are familiar. Associating the school librarian with story time and children's literature is not completely off the mark, but national standards and professional guidelines stipulate that the 21<sup>st</sup> century library media specialist (LMS) should be doing much more than reading stories aloud and checking out books. Thus, the profession finds itself in an identity crisis, a term coined by psychologist Eric Erikson (1968) which, in lay terms, describes a process by which an individual,

group, or organization attempts to define itself and integrate its ideas of itself with those held by others. A person experiencing an identity crisis exhibits signs of confusion, not knowing who they are, where they belong, or where they want to go. Erikson (1968) positions the phase of development known as *Identity* at adolescence and labels the adolescent angst over where one will “fit in” or what roles they will play in adulthood “role confusion.”

The profession of school librarianship should be long past its adolescent stage - the role confusion it is experiencing has existed for almost 50 years. Although school librarians have struggled to negotiate their identities in public K12 education for decades, this identity crisis seems to have reached a critical point due to changes in learning environments in the U.S. brought about by federal legislation, the implementation of standards-based teaching, the emphasis on standardized criterion referenced testing, and the proliferation and ubiquitous use of computers and the Internet as information sources. These monumental changes, having begun during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continuing into the present, are unprecedented in their effects on K12 education as a whole and the school library media profession in particular.

The roles of the person who works in a school library, as well as their title - librarian, teacher-librarian, library teacher, library media specialist, school librarian, library media teacher (Franklin, 2009) - have undergone countless revisions since the first official school libraries opened their doors in the early 1900s. Neuman (2004) states that the evolution of the school librarian from a warehouse of books and materials to a central figure in the school’s instructional program has been

tied inextricably to the official standards and guidelines for the field, a set of documents dating to the 1920s that, over the years, have served a dual purpose: to describe the library media specialist's roles and responsibilities in the periods in which they were written and to urge the field forward toward an ever-increasing degree of professionalism in the period to follow. (pp. 499-500)

In 1988 the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) published *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*, a document that detailed three primary roles of a library media specialist (LMS): teacher, information specialist, and instructional consultant (AASL & AECT, 1988). When this publication was revised and reissued in 1998 as *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*, the roles were expanded and redefined as: teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator (AASL & AECT, 1998). The most recent iteration of AASL's library media guidelines is *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (AASL, 2009) which emphasizes the necessity of the LMS serving in a leadership role within their learning community. Other roles that have been suggested for the LMS are literacy development agent, independent reading and personal development agent, individualized learning agent (Haycock, 2004), change facilitator (Wehmeyer, 1987), reading instructor (Trinkle, 2006), the district's advisor on No Child Left Behind (M. Smith, 2002), and chief technology training and support specialist (Anderson, 2008). The predominant focus of the professional literature in recent years, however, has been on the school librarian as collaborative teaching partner and technology leader (Buzzeo, 2007; Haycock, 2004; Johnston, 2012; Shannon, 2001; R. Todd, 2002). These roles, however, have not been wholeheartedly embraced by many practitioners (Barron, 2005; Haycock, 2004; Hickel, 2006; Ross Todd, 2008b). New LMSs discover

quickly that they are expected to fill numerous, diverse roles that seem to be in a constant state of flux. How these novice practitioners begin to build their library media specialist identities and how those identities manifest themselves in practice is the focus of this research.

A review of the limited literature on LMS identity (Lambert, 2004; McCracken, 2001; Shannon, 2001), the work I do with new library media specialists in my job as a coordinator who supports library media specialists, and my personal history and experience constructing an LMS identity of my own led me to this exploration of the contexts of identity creation that Holland called “negotiations of positionality, space of authoring, and world making” (Urrieta, 2007, p. 111). As novice (first year) LMSs leave their pre-service programs and embark on their careers, the priorities they set, programs they develop, and the ways in which they identify as LMSs will be outward manifestations of their positions within the *figured worlds* in which they function. Using Holland et al’s concept of *figured worlds* (1998) as a conceptual framework, this study explored how the *figured worlds* of the schoolhouse and the social and cultural expectations of those worlds impacted the ways that four novice LMSs began to build and enact a library media specialist identity during their first year of practice.

### **Who are Library Media Specialists?**

The individuals who enter the position of school LMS have traveled diverse career paths and been schooled in a variety of ways. Certification requirements for the field vary greatly in the United States, with most states requiring all or some of the following: a master's degree in library and information science or a related field, teacher certification or classroom experience and additional course credit hours (Thomas & Perritt, 2003). In the state of Georgia, candidates for the position of LMS

may qualify for certification if they have attended an American Library Association (ALA) accredited institution that offers a masters in library science, a National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) sanctioned program, or received a library media endorsement to an already existing master's in education (Commission, 2008). With the advent of completely web-based graduate degrees, a growing number of LMS candidates choose to attend online programs, while others continue to enroll in traditional brick and mortar programs or those that offer a combination of classroom and on-line learning opportunities.

In addition to having diverse educational backgrounds, the novice school librarian may also differ widely from his or her colleagues in their previous work experience. My personal observations reveal that many new LMSs are classroom teachers making a transition to the library media center. Others have worked as public or university librarians and wish to move to the K-12 environment. Quite a few have worked as library media clerks in school libraries and pursued their certification so that they can take charge of a media center while some are stay-at-home parents returning to the workforce. A smaller group encompasses the career changers who come from outside of the educational community and may have corporate or other work experience.

Finally, the contexts within which novice library media specialists find themselves as they begin to work in their first school library will greatly influence their decisions, actions and identities. The expectations of district level coordinators, administrators, teachers, and students, the culture of the school, the practices of past librarians and traditions and other features of the *figured world* that is their new school setting will have an enormous impact on how they figure themselves as school library media specialists.

The changing expectations of the LMS, the diverse avenues through which one can gain entry into the field, the isolation in which most LMSs practice, and the varied backgrounds and experiences of the candidates produce a complex set of conditions under which preparation programs attempt to design meaningful, pertinent programs of study, mentors and induction programs attempt to meet novice's needs, and student and novice LMSs begin to negotiate their professional identities. The goal of this research was to explore how these factors combine to inform LMSs' self-understanding, identity or, simply, how LMSs "define themselves to themselves and to others" (Lasky in Darby, 2008, p. 1161).

### **Problem Statement**

Armed with their freshly minted certificates, novice LMSs enter their first library assignment with a set of expectations, hopes and goals for their first year of practice. However, most administrators (Church, 2007; A. Kaplan, 2006) and teachers (McCracken, 2001; Montiel-Overall, 2005) have their own preconceived understandings of the role of the media specialist. New LMSs are faced with the daunting task of attempting to construct their professional identities while educating and informing the people that they serve about their purpose and roles. Library pundits have been imploring LMSs to "do a better job of clearly articulating their roles" (Lowe, 2000, para. 8) for some time. Additionally, there is often a discrepancy between the roles emphasized in the literature and pre-service preparation and the roles most frequently expected and practiced (McCoy, 2001). The identities afforded novice LMSs within the context of the *figured worlds* of K12 public education may differ greatly from what they imagined; some may become frustrated and feel inadequate and unsuccessful in their jobs. They may never attempt to adopt the best practices to which they were introduced during their

preparation programs and practicum experiences to attempt to meet the often unrealistic expectations of school stakeholders (particularly administrators) who have their own ideas of what an LMS is and does. The immediate and real demands of the library media center, the school culture, and expectations of administrators, teachers, and students, may challenge the novice's vision and construction of their professional identity before they have taught their first class or checked out their first book.

As the school library profession has attempted to define and adjust their roles and responsibilities in response to educational trends and technological innovations, they have also found themselves needing to justify and protect their positions within the K-12 educational community (Lowe, 2000; R. Todd, 2002; Ross Todd, 2008b). Research has shown that the collaborative, instructional roles espoused by both editions of *Information Power, Empowering Learners*, and in other professional literature are rarely those attributed to the LMS or most valued by teachers and administrators (Dorrell & Lawson, 1995). Most distressing are McCracken's (2001) findings that LMSs themselves often do not have a clear understanding of their role(s) and have not wholeheartedly assumed the instructional consultant and teacher roles prescribed in AASL literature. The traditional understandings of the LMS's functions (circulation, story reading, information specialist) that many LMSs continue to emulate may not be the most supportive of student achievement. Research has indicated that an LMS who works as an instructional consultant, teacher and co-teacher and assists classroom teachers with the delivery of content and information literacy skills plays an integral part in long-term student success (AASL & AECT, 1998; K. Lance, Welborn, & Hamilton-Pennell, 1994; Small, Snyder, & Parker, 2009). The misperceptions of the role of the LMS on the part of all

stakeholders serve to undermine the LMS's efforts to establish themselves as instructional specialists and collaborative partners. Of particular concern, however, is the incongruity apparent in LMSs' perceived and practiced roles. The disparity between expectations and actual practice may erode support for the staffing of library media centers with certified professionals, as indeed it has in school districts throughout the country (Everhart, 2002; Jesseman, 2006; Whelan, 2003). Many LMSs, although aware of the importance of their roles as teachers and instructional designers and the impact they can have on students' long-term success, do not show evidence of this awareness in their practice (Coatney, 2007; Lowe, 2000; McCracken, 2001; O'Neal, 2004). As O'Neal (2004) concludes,

changes in the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and media specialists in the field are necessary or the struggle becomes perpetual as each new generation enters the profession. The implications are that media specialists may be doing more than is known or they may not be performing as well as they believe they are. (p. 300)

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this naturalistic case study informed by phenomenological and narrative inquiry was to explore how novice library media specialists come to understand themselves, or construct professional identity, in the figured worlds of K12 public schools.

### **Guiding Questions**

The overarching question that guided this research was:

1. How do novice library media specialists describe their professional identities?

Sub-questions that arose were:

- a. How does personal history inform the construction of professional identity of novice library media specialists?

- b. How do novice library media specialists negotiate identity within the figured worlds of public K12 schools?

### **Theoretical Framework**

People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves, and then try to act as though they are who they say they are. These self-understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for the teller, are what we refer to as identities. (D. Holland, et al., 1998, p. 3; J. Holland, 1985)

The concept of *identity* is ubiquitous in society today and defined variously as *self-concept* (Stryker & Burke, 2000), *essential self*, or the distinguishing characteristics or personality of an individual. Labels that people place on themselves and others such as “smart girl,” “disruptive student,” and “caring teacher” are often thought to constitute identity. However, “Identity is also very much about how people come to understand themselves, how they come to ‘figure’ who they are, through the ‘worlds’ that they participate in and how they relate to others within and outside of these worlds” (Urrieta, 2007, p. 107). Holland, et al, (1998) as well as Stryker and Burke (2000) base their concepts of identity in the American school of social psychology founded by G. H. Mead whose framework asserted that society shapes the self and self shapes social behavior (Crotty, 1998). Mead’s (1934) theory of symbolic interactionism claims that people act toward things based on the meaning those things have for them, and these meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation. According to Mead, self-consciousness and self-reflection develop in us as a result of social history and we learn to take the standpoint of others as we objectify ourselves through our performances in and commitment to various social positions (i.e., student, good person, environmentalist). The strength of the emotional attachment to such objectifications determines which becomes the core of an individual’s identity.

Symbolic interactionist researchers investigate how people create meaning during social interaction, how they present and construct identity, and how they define situations in which they find themselves with others. One of the perspective's central ideas is that people act as they do because of how they define situations. Symbolic interactionism has framed a substantial amount of work regarding the development of the self, self-concept, and the presentation of the self (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2001). In determining how the self shapes an individual's actions, interactionists ask how we see ourselves and how that changes over time. Symbolic interactionism provides the theoretical foundation of this study, as it has for the conceptual frameworks developed by Flores and Day (2006) and Holland et al (1998) that will guide the investigation.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The understanding of identity utilized in this study is based on Holland et al's (1998) sociocultural practice theory of identity which maintains that identity is in constant flux and is a process of becoming, not a fixed state. Rather than limiting the development of self and behavior to only two areas of influence - the individual (or group) and the environment - Holland accepts Bordieu's suggestion that practice is a third factor that mediates between objectivism (environment) and subjectivism (person or group) in determining social action.

Persons develop more or less conscious conceptions of themselves as actors in socially and culturally constructed worlds, and these senses of themselves these identities, to the degree that they are conscious and objectified, permit these persons, through the kinds of semiotic mediation described by Vygotsky, at least a modicum of agency or control over their own behavior. (D. Holland, et al., 1998, p. 40)

Holland et al move away (although not completely) from cultural determinism and situational totalitarianism and acknowledge the ability of individuals to improvise

and innovate, thereby creating agency and possible change. Significant to this concept is “the situatedness of identity in collectively formed activities. The ‘identities’ that concern us are ones that trace our participation, especially our agency, in socially produced, culturally constructed activities – what we call figured worlds” (D. Holland, et al., 1998, pp. 40-41).

Figured worlds, as described by Holland et al in *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (1998), consider activity and improvisation vital components of construction of identity and agency. While cultural organization and reproduction cannot be dismissed, the attention in figured worlds is on the “figures” (people) who populate and participate in those worlds on a daily basis, rather than on culture, historical patterns of behavior, or cognitive sense-making of people in bound systems. A figured world is “a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (D. Holland, et al., 1998, p. 52). For example, the figured world of a public elementary school recognizes the principal, teachers, specialists (such as the library media specialist), students and other community stakeholders and assigns them possible roles and types: good teacher, strict principal, smart student, organized librarian. Significance is applied to the teachers’ ability to maintain order and produce high scores on state standardized tests; the principal’s success at running the school efficiently with few behavior problems, high test scores, and effective staff; students’ ability to follow school rules and achieve on tests; and to librarians who have tidy, quiet, organized libraries, provide planning time for teachers, and perform a great story time. Achievement on high stakes testing is valued over inquiry or project based learning or teaching for deep understanding and application. Therefore, the

LMS who sees his role as curriculum designer, instructional leader, and more than a babysitter may find herself less valued in this figured world than their training may have led them to anticipate.

Figured worlds create a context of meaning and “provide the loci in which people fashion senses of self – that is, develop identities” (D. Holland, et al., 1998, p. 60). The “figuring out” of who an individual is within this context (their identity) is a “function of each person’s subjective experience, or personal history” (Robinson, 2007, p. 193) and interactions with the other participants in these worlds. People’s understandings of who they are can shift and change as a result of their participation in figured worlds and “individuals also come to understand their ability to craft their future participation, or agency, in and across” (Urrieta, 2007, p. 120) these worlds. However, although self-determination and agency are possible, power structures exist and positions matter. For example, in the figured world of the elementary school, the principal has enormous power and an uncooperative LMS could be ranked quite low in the power hierarchy. As Robinson (2007) explains, “the ‘figuring’ described above is often contested, and rather than having the agency to figure or refigure one’s self, the individual is ‘figured’ or ‘positioned’ within that world” (2007, p. 194). In figured worlds people learn to recognize each other as a particular sort of actor, value certain outcomes over others, and recognize and attach significance to some acts and not others.

Figured worlds are one of four contexts Holland et al describes for production of identity; the other three are negotiations of positionality, space of authoring, and world making. Positionality refers to positions offered to participants in different figured worlds (such as “good teacher”, “disruptive student”, “mean librarian”). Individuals are faced with rejecting, accepting, or negotiating the identities being

offered. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism (the ability of people to sense-make through internal dialogues) informs Holland et al's space of authoring. People must make choices as to how they will respond when offered positions and must answer; authorship is not a choice but a necessity. The self that is authored is not predetermined. The third context for the production of identities is in world making. The possibility for creating new practices, artifacts, discourses, and acts exists as individuals begin to engage in and create new figured worlds. Through examination of artifacts from these worlds, including interviews and observations, this research has investigated the ways in which the figured world inhabited by novice library media specialists shaped their identities and actions. The participants and researcher have together reflected on how the positions afforded them, the decisions they make, their participation and activities, and the ways they author their "selves" result in a library media specialist identity.

Other scholars whose theories inform this research include Stryker and Burke (2000) as well as Burke and Reitzes (1981), who describe identities as meanings one attributes to oneself, and that others attribute to one, in a role. Stryker and Burke's (2000) identity model suggests three characteristics of an identity. First, identities are social products, formed and maintained through social processes. Second, identities are self meanings and "organized hierarchically to produce the self" (Stryker, in Burke & Reitzes, 1981, p. 84). Third, identities are symbolic and reflexive in character. The meanings of the self are learned from responses of others to one's own actions; in turn, an individual's actions develop meaning through the responses of others. "Ones' actions, words, and appearances thus become significant symbols" (Mead in Burke & Reitzes, 1981, p. 84).

Stryker and Burke's (2000) theory of identity merged two aspects of identity: the effect of external factors (society) on identity and the effect that internalization of societal influences has on behavior within the contexts in which those identities are held. The resulting theory reflects both the external and internal processes that inform identity construction. It is at this point in the discussion that Holland inserts the third factor of practice or activity. Stryker and Burke maintain that identity is multifaceted and that persons possess as many selves as there are groups of persons with which they interact or play roles. They theorize that role choices are a function of identity and that identities are organized within the self based upon an "identity salience" hierarchy. Stryker and Burke hypothesize that "the higher the salience of an identity relative to other identities incorporated into the self, the greater the probability of behavioral choices in accord with the expectations attached to that identity" (2000, p. 286). This theory has direct implications for the ways in which LMSs enact and perform the identities they assume. This research has examined both the internal (historical, preconceived, education-based) forces that shaped new LMSs as they began practice and the external forces (school culture and climate, administrators) that mold the ways that new LMSs think of themselves and how they act in their jobs.

Burke and Reitzes (1981) proposed that individuals' actions and behaviors are directly related to their self-conceptions or identities. They engaged in empirical research meant to test the argument that "individuals are motivated to formulate plans and achieve levels of performance or activity that reinforce, support, and confirm their identities" (1981, p. 84). Their conclusion was that behavior is linked to identity through the process of assessing the meanings held by the individual about identities and actions. In order to be a library media specialist, for example, one

must act like a library media specialist. In order to NOT be (some other identity), one must not act like (that other identity). However, identities are not static or singular; most role/identities exist within a context of multiple counter-role/identities. Each of these role/identities bear multiple dimensions of meaning that are relevant in distinguishing between them. Actions, therefore, are also connected to multiple meanings and may be linked to more than one identity. The strength of the link is determined by the relevance of the activity to the meaning in question. This relationship between socially constructed identity and action provides a theoretical foundation for my research. As pre-service and novice LMSs encounter individuals and situations that apply the identity label "LMS" to them, the meanings and internal processes that take precedence in their construction of identity will also influence their actions and behaviors. Those actions will, in turn, reflect back onto the LMS through others' perceptions and interpretations of how those actions define them in a certain role. This conception of identity is informed by social constructionism, a theory of knowledge that asserts "that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). I believe that the construction of professional identity is an ongoing process that is constantly negotiated and renegotiated by the participants in the social contexts in which they live and work.

Baumeister states

Personal identity is a crucial interface between the private organism and society. The identity represents an important means by which the physical being takes its place in society so as to communicate and interact with other people. Meanwhile the broader society assigns roles to the individual and shapes the values the person holds, so that identity is also an important means by which society can influence and control his or her behavior. It is no more correct to say that the individual is passively created by society than it is to regard society as a mere outcome of the choices and actions of

autonomous, self-determined individuals; self and society shape each other. (1997, p. 191)

James Paul Gee, noted psycholinguist and discourse analyst, defines identity as “Being recognized as a ‘certain kind of person,’ in a given context...” (2000, p. 99). He further states, “In this sense of the term, all people have multiple identities connected not to their ‘internal states’ but to their performances in society” (Gee, 2000, p. 99). Gee outlines four ways of viewing identity.

According to Gee (2000), Nature-identity claims that we are what we are primarily because of our natures; Institution-identity credits the positions we occupy in society with the primary influence on identity; Discourse-identity is that which is derived from our individual accomplishments as they are perceived and recognized by others; and Affinity-identity arises from experiences we have had with certain “affinity groups.” Gee stresses that these four perspectives do not exist separately from each other but that they are interrelated and provide a framework for viewing the different ways in which identities are formed, maintained, and changed. In his words, “They are four ways to formulate questions about how identity is functioning for a specific person...in a given context or across a set of different contexts” (2000, p. 101). Gee states that all four perspectives may be present as a person acts within a given context. I utilized Gee’s framework to help identify ways in which novice library media specialists’ identities were formed and factors that affected that identity formation. In particular, I looked for the evidence of Discourse-identity and Affinity-identity development as they relate to the construction of professional identity among novice LMSs. Gee’s Discourse (as opposed to discourse with a small “d”) refers to the combination of language with other social practices (behavior, values, ways of thinking, clothes, food, customs, perspectives) within a specific

group. Gee links Discourse to identity and claims that if you belong to a certain identity group (such as teacher) you have been recognized as using a certain type of discourse that is accepted by the community as the norm (Alsup, 2006). Alsup further explains that

Being a teacher means that an individual has mastered a certain set or kind of discourse – one that includes speaking, writing, dressing, acting and even living within certain boundaries or in accordance with certain often unwritten rules that govern the discourse community. (2006, pp. 38-39)

The Discourses of K12 education, including those of being a teacher or a library media specialist will be investigated as they impact novice’s development of their professional identities. I find Gee’s concept of Discourse helpful in conceiving figured worlds: multiple, often competing, Discourses may exist within a figured world. Gee explains that

Yet another way to look at Discourses is as 'clubs' with (tacit) rules about who is a member and who is not, and (tacit) rules about how members ought to behave (if they wish to continue being accepted as members). Being a member of a family, a peer group, a community group or church, a drinking group, a classroom, a profession, a research team, an ethnic group, a sub-culture or a culture requires 'rites of passage' to enter the group, the maintenance of certain behaviors (ways of talking, valuing, thinking) to continue to be accepted as an 'insider', and continued 'tests' of membership applied by others. (Gee, 1990, p. 143)

Bruner (1990) states that identity is not only socially and culturally constructed, “but is represented through the narratives that people use to describe their own actions and interactions with others” (Agee, 2000, p. 4). Bruner advocated using narrative research to explore how identity is defined by both the individual and the culture. The narratives that people construct represent not only their perceptions but the rationales for those perceptions. Bruner claimed “The Self as narrator not only recounts but justifies” (as cited in Agee, 2000, p. 4). Riessman

claims that the use of narrative inquiry methods comes from contemporary preoccupations with identity.

No longer viewed as given and ‘natural,’ individuals must now construct who they are and how they want to be known, just as groups, organizations, and governments do. In postmodern times, identities can be assembled and disassembled, accepted and contested, and indeed performed for audiences. (Riessman, 2008, p. 7)

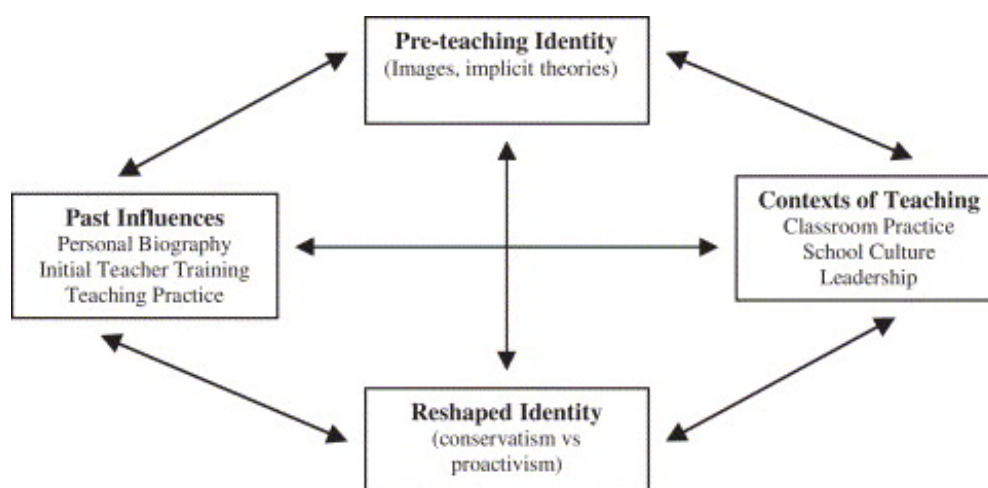
Yuval-Davis states: “Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)” (in Riessman, 2008, p. 8).

Riessman uses the terms *narrative* and *story* interchangeably to refer to texts at “several levels that overlap: stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant’s and investigator’s narratives” (2008, p. 6). Riessman states that although narrative analysis interrogates cases rather than larger samples of the population, the results can still be generalized to theoretical propositions that can be transferable. Sfard and Prusak (2005) also promote the utilization of the stories told by people about themselves to understand their identities. They not only believe that narratives, or stories, provide insight into identity, but that at any given moment first person, self-told identity stories *are* the self-made identities of the storyteller. By inviting novice LMSs to share, through interviews, writing prompts, and other artifacts, their identities and factors that have influenced those identities became apparent. Additionally, Sfard and Prusak claim that “the first person self-told identities are likely to have the most immediate impact on our actions” (2005, p. 17), once again linking identity to action.

Finally, Flores and Day (2006), who undertook a longitudinal study of teachers' professional identities during the first two years of their careers, explored key influences on those identities and how they are "shaped and reshaped over time" (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 19). The data revealed that the key mediating influences upon the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of teachers' professional identities were: 1) prior influences, 2) initial teacher training and teaching practice, and 3) contexts of teaching (see Figure 1 below).

*Figure 1*

Key mediating Influences on the Formation of Teacher Identity



*Figure 1.* Reprinted from "Contexts which shape and reshape new teachers' identities: A multi-perspective study," by Flores, M. A. and Day, C., 2006, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22, p. 230. Reprinted with permission.

Flores and Day's research identified the powerful relationship between personal histories and the contextual influences of the workplace. They found that the identities of the new teachers had been "strongly personally embedded at the beginning of their teaching careers, but destabilized by the negative school contexts and cultures in which they worked" (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 230) and that despite the strong connections between personal biography and the maintenance of a stable identity, in most cases history was mediated by context. Flores and Day's work informs this research through its identification of primary influencers of teacher identity.

### **Significance of the Study**

The library media specialist is an endangered member of the K12 educational community. As state and district education budgets are reduced, the library media specialist's position is often one of the first eliminated. The confusion and misunderstanding among all educational stakeholders, including LMSs, regarding the roles and purpose of a library media specialist within the school has contributed to the decline in respect and maintenance of funding for this position. At the writing of this dissertation, the District in which this research took place was grappling with a budget deficit for the next school year of almost \$100 million. Two of the cost-saving measures proposed to the board of education were the elimination of all elementary library media clerks and the laying off of 25 library media specialists. The relative value of a library media specialist to the successful attainment of the District's mission and goals was obviously in question. The new library media specialists who participated in this study found themselves in a field that many fear faces imminent extinction. Developing an understanding of the ways in which new LMSs construct their professional identities will inform LMS preparation, induction,

and mentoring programs and will also hopefully help the field and its practitioners redefine themselves in ways that encourage the evolution of the work rather than its eventual fossilization. It will also add to the body of knowledge regarding LMS identity which, unlike teacher identity, has received little scholarly attention.

Through in-depth interviews and observations, I have explored the interplay of internal understandings, social interactions and personal agency as well as the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants so that I may understand becoming an LMS from their perspectives.

### **Limitations**

Research is an inherently political process. As we (researchers) make decisions about

...whom we want to ask to speak about what and when we figure out how to do the asking, observing, or measuring. We make decisions about whether, we, the researcher, or the people the research is about or with will be the final authority on what is said. (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001, p. 324)

I have attempted to remain conscious of the direct relationship between my own shifting subjectivities, positionality, situatedness, and beliefs with my choice of research topic, subjects, questions, data, and the results of my analysis. There is no question that I am not an “objective” scientific observer, as no observer is. I was motivated to explore this topic by observations I had made during the four years that I worked at the district level supporting new LMSs. Having experienced my own extreme frustration with the lack of awareness and understanding that the majority of teachers and administrators demonstrated regarding what I consider the important roles of the LMS, I wanted to try to find ways to change those perceptions. Upon closer inspection, however, I found that many of their perceptions and understandings of the LMS roles and functions were based on what they had

observed or experienced with LMSs in their schools. The reason that many LMSs were not actively involved in curriculum development, instructional design, technology integration, information literacy instruction, or co-teaching seemed to be because their LMS identities did not include those roles. Obviously, this issue was more complex than I had originally believed. My preconceived ideas about why people were behaving the way they were needed to be constantly monitored throughout the research process. Through journaling and memo writing, I have worked to remain aware of my biases and to reflect on those preconceptions as I listened and learned about my participants' experiences.

A limitation of this research is the researcher bias that may have arisen from my job as a district level administrator in the department that supports library media programs in the system where the participants became employed in their first library media specialist positions. In my job I acted as a mentor for new LMSs that came to work in the District, whether they were new to the profession or simply new to the District. Through this work, I began to form opinions about LMS identity and the types of challenges and changes novice LMSs experience as they moved from pre-service to in-service. Another potential source of bias was my personal experiences as an LMS and how those experiences may have colored the interpretation of the data. These potential biases were mediated through reflexivity; I regularly reflected upon my own thoughts, reactions, and interpretations during data collection and analysis and wrote memos noting my personal subjectivities throughout the process. Additionally, member checking was utilized on multiple occasions to gather further input from the participants regarding the interpretation of their contributions to the research.

The accuracy of the subjects' memories cannot be verified, however, and the point of the research was to explore their lived experiences and the meaning they made of those experiences; it is inconsequential if their memories were "accurate." More important was that the subjects were able to report on their experience as they remembered it and reflected on those experiences in ways that allow us a glimpse into the shifting landscapes of new LMSs identities.

### **Delimitations**

The purposive, convenience sampling method utilized to select study participants limited this study to library media specialists in their first year of practice who had been employed by the Hugo County School District. Other groups of new media specialists in the geographical vicinity of the researcher were impossible to identify or access; a neighboring district refused to grant access to their staff. Therefore, the results of this study reflect the experiences of a somewhat homogenous group of novice LMS; their sameness lies in the fact that they were dealing with a similar district culture, support system, and student populations.

### **Summary**

First year library media specialists are often unprepared for the challenges they face as they attempt to establish their professional identities in the figured worlds of public K12 education. Because most administrators and teachers are not educated about the roles and responsibilities of the LMS, they often have expectations that diverge greatly from those that the new LMS brings with them from their preparation program. This research explored the factors that impacted the way four novice LMSs negotiated their professional identities within the figured worlds of their first school library assignments. Over the course of their first year of practice, the interplay of the participants' biographies, preparation programs, and

the figured worlds of their schools was examined through a qualitative case study methodology. The guiding questions, Flores & Day's teacher identity model, and Holland's theory of identity and agency in figured worlds provided a framework for this research. In this chapter I have described the limitations and delimitations and have defined key terms. It is my hope that the results of this research will help inform the practices and innovations of those responsible for preparing, training, educating, mentoring, inducting, and supporting library media specialists.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP):* No Child Left Behind requires states to measure "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) for schools receiving Title I funds with the goal of all students reaching the proficient level on reading/language arts and mathematics tests by the 2013-2014 school year. States must define minimum levels of improvement as measured by standardized tests chosen by the state.

*Affinity identity:* Identity that an individual may assume through an allegiance to a set of common discursive practices shared by a group.

*Collaboration:* A cooperative venture between teachers or teachers and LMSs in which the collaborators voluntarily work together toward a shared goal, with shared accountability, shared responsibility for key decisions, and is based upon the sharing of resources (time, expertise, space, equipment, etc.) and a belief that all individuals' contributions are valued equally (Montiel-Overall, 2005).

*Discourse (D) identity:* D-identities are formed through the discourse or dialogue of "rational individuals." This discourse creates a description of an individual or group of individuals which they accept or have ascribed to them.

*Figured world:* A socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to

certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. (D. Holland, et al., 1998, p. 52)

*Identity:* How one sees him/herself in any given context at a certain moment in time.

*In-service (adj.):* A teacher or other educator who has completed their preparation program and is actively teaching students.

*Institution (I) identity:* Identity whose source is an institution or set of authorities

*Library media center:* The term “library media center” and acronym LMC will represent the place in a PreK-12 school setting that provides students, staff and community members’ access to a variety of resources and information.

*Library media specialist:* The certified, credentialed individual who oversees, guides and directs the library media center and library media program will be referred to as library media specialist or LMS. This term is used interchangeably in the literature with media specialist, teacher-librarian, and school librarian.

*Library media program:* A library media program should support and further the school’s mission, goals, and expectations for student learning through instruction, resources, facilities, technologies, and access to information.

*Narrative:* Texts at “several levels that overlap: stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant’s and investigator’s narratives” (Riessman, 2008, p. 6).

*Needs improvement school:* Schools that fail to meet AYP goals for two or more years are classified as schools "in need of improvement" and face consequences

that range from having to provide school transfer options to complete restructuring of the school.

*Novice library media specialist:* A new library media specialist in their first or second year of practice.

*Pre-service:* A teacher or other educator who has not completed their preparation program and may or may not have completed an internship or practicum (i.e., student teaching) and has not begun their professional teaching career.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*First, the principal tried to reason with Miss Scales, but his plan backfired.  
 Instead of cooling her down, he just fanned the flames.  
 The principal fumed. The teachers were incensed. Worst of all, the children had  
 missed reading and storytime for weeks and their grades were going up in smoke.*  
 Carmen Agra Deedy  
*The Library Dragon, p. 11*

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how novice library media specialists come to understand themselves and construct professional identity in the figured world of public K12 education during their first year of practice. In order to begin to understand how new LMSs negotiate identity as they transition from pre-service to in-service, a naturalistic qualitative approach grounded in narrative inquiry will be utilized. This review of literature delves into the three major areas of research that inform this study: training and perceptions of pre-service LMSs, the roles of the LMS, and teacher identity development. Although little scholarly research has actually focused on identity construction among school LMSs, the following review looks to teacher identity studies to provide a framework for exploring LMS identity.

#### Pre-service and Novice Library Media Specialists

In my work mentoring new LMSs in a large, urban school district, I have encountered both veteran and novice LMSs who have attempted to embrace and pursue the mission, goals and roles espoused for the profession by the professional organizations and leaders in the field: the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), as well as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The majority of new

LMSs, however, seem confused as to what they are actually supposed to do once they enter their new library/classroom. Anecdotal articles abound, but very little scholarly research into the recruitment, induction, mentoring or retention of LMSs exists. What follows is a review of the literature that deals specifically with pre-service or novice LMSs.

### **Pre-service Library Media Specialists' Perceptions and Experiences**

The experiences of pre-service LMSs who were teachers making the transition from the classroom to the library media center were documented by Mardis (2007a). These teachers initially felt that the practica required for the LMS certification was redundant since they had already completed student teaching assignments as a prerequisite to entering the classroom. Utilizing the Concerns Based Adjustment Model (CBAM) to measure and categorize the attitudes of the interns during their practicum experiences, the researcher concluded that the students' focus expanded outward from self to task to impact, as the CBAM model suggests. They began their internships feeling that their classroom management expertise "trumped any adjustment" (p. 231) that they might have to make to the library media center environment. As they progressed through the internship they became more concerned with the administrative tasks of the library media center and their ability to manage the responsibilities of teaching and program administration. Eventually they showed even more concern about leading an effective library media program that would have positive effects on student learning. Time spent in the library media center pointed out to the subjects that, although their prior classroom teaching experience was valuable in their teacher/instructional roles, the management of all facets of the library media program required new and distinct skills that were not part of the classroom teaching experience. The

transformations in these pre-service LMSs' attitudes and identities may not necessarily be replicated in all practicum experiences due to poor placement, lack of proper supervision, or inadequate experiences. This study, however, provides insight into the types of pre-service experiences that lend themselves to the building of professional identity among LMSs.

Another study that looked at pre-service LMSs was that of Hanson-Baldauf and Hassell (2009) who explored the perceived information and communication technologies (ICT) competencies of students enrolled in school library media programs in colleges and universities across the country. Although there has been a dramatic increase in the number of computers and access to the Internet in K12 schools over the last decade, evidence has shown that integration of these new technologies into instruction has not kept pace with technology availability. Leaders in the school library field have encouraged LMSs to take a leadership role in the modeling and implementation of such technology integration. However, Hanson-Baldauf and Hassell ask, "Are school library media professionals adequately prepared for the task of integrating technology and skills into instruction?" (2009, p. 3). The survey responses of 298 pre-service LMSs provided demographic data regarding the individuals who are entering the field of school librarianship. They are primarily 40ish years old (average age = 41), digital immigrants who were classroom teachers (70%) seeking add-on certification in library media technology. Although responses of the subjects to questions that indicated their level of technological competency showed the majority at the Entry level, or beginning stages, of technology usage and integration, the majority of them indicated that they felt "well prepared" or "somewhat prepared" to integrate technology into instruction. The researchers hypothesized that the contradiction between these two measures could

rest in the fact that many of the respondents are already working in K12 schools where their vision of technology use and integration has been formed by what they have witnessed and experienced. They may feel relatively prepared to utilize available technologies based on the uses most often reported in schools, such as drill and practice, tutorials, writing and electronic presentations. The authors conclude that it is imperative that LMS educators design learning experiences that will allow “not only precertified school librarians but also LIS faculty to confidently and competently ride the wave of technological change and innovation” (Hanson-Baldauf & Hassell, 2009, p. 10). It is their belief that the experiences student LMSs have will determine the extent to which they integrate technology into their own practice and feel comfortable enough to take a technology leadership role in their schools. School LMSs are in the unique position of having the freedom to design learning activities that integrate the many ICT tools students are accustomed to using outside of school, facilitating projects and creation of knowledge and content that feels authentic and pertinent to these digital natives. Technological competence may not be a negotiable item in the 21<sup>st</sup> century LMSs skill set; nor may it be one in the faculty that prepares them.

Mardis and Dickinson (2009) conducted an exploratory study of pre-service LMSs to investigate their perceptions of the *AASL Standards for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner* (2007). The purpose of the study was to gather the perceptions of new LMSs toward standards in general and about the implementation of the new standards in particular. These standards are meant to:

- serve as a framework for K-12 school library program design through the use of thematic strands;
- provide detail about the skills, dispositions, and responsibilities fundamental to rich resource-based learning; and

- serve as a guide for curriculum decisions by providing assessment strategies regarding knowledge, processes, and attitudes essential for all students. (Mardis, 2007a, para. 3)

The results of the focus groups conducted provided insight into the novice LMSs understanding of the standards and what they perceived they would mean to their practice. The subjects in the study were overwhelmingly positive about the structure and content of the new standards and compared them favorably to the previous *AASL Information Literacy Standards for the Student Learner*. They felt that the standards reflected the new ways of learning that the current information-rich environment encourages and would allow more seamless integration with already existing state and local standards. The most exciting aspect of the new standards to the participants was the shifting of the control of learning to students through understanding of technology and information. Barriers to the implementation of standards have, in the past, been vast. However, the pre-service LMSs in this study perceived that the new standards would be easily “coordinated with classroom activities and goals” (Mardis & Dickinson, 2009, Conclusions, para. 12). The most important data gathered through this research were the responses to “Research Question 4: In what ways should pre-service education experiences prepare pre-service LMSs to fosters [*sic*] principles embodied [*sic*] the standards?” (Mardis & Dickinson, 2009, Conclusions, para. 13). Pre-service LMSs felt that their university preparation programs needed to provide practical training in the use and troubleshooting of available technologies. They identified mastery of technology as essential to their ability to implement the standards with fidelity.

Another study that pointed out the disconnect between the beliefs of school administrators, pre-service librarians, and library information science (LIS) faculty was one conducted by Roys and Brown (2004) via a survey administered to members

of these three groups. The purpose of this study was to elicit perceptions of what makes a preferred LMS candidate. A list of 26 qualities was provided to the subjects who were asked to rate each as to whether they were of great importance, fair importance, some importance, minimal importance, or no importance when hiring an LMS. The researchers designated criteria that averaged midway between great (5) and fair (4) importance as “important” and found that administrators view the following six criteria as important when considering LMS applications:

- ability to work well with others
- evidence of strong managerial skills
- Strong technology skills with knowledge of classroom integration
- Recommendation from previous school personnel
- Evidence of excellent classroom management skills; and
- Educational philosophy in alignment with district.

Library information system (LIS) faculty view the following five criteria as important:

- Ability to work well with others
- Evidence of excellent teaching skills
- An MLS degree
- Library endorsement on teaching certificate and
- Evidence of strong managerial skills

LIS students view the following criteria as important:

- Ability to work well with others
- Strong technology skills with knowledge of classroom integration; and
- An MLS degree (Roys & Brown, 2004, Results section, para. 3).

The candidate’s ability to work well with others was the top-rated quality in each of the survey groups and the only quality that was on all three lists of important characteristics. While the goal of the study was to determine if administrators, LIS students, and LIS faculty had common beliefs about the important traits an LMS should possess, Roys and Brown indicate that a more pressing question arose from the data: whether “administrators, faculty, and students have a shared and realistic view of the role of the SLMS in the curriculum, and therefore, in the school” (2004, Discussion, para. 9). They make the point that if

administrators have a narrow view of the role of the LMS and value a set of qualifications that are limited in scope, they may overlook qualified candidates for the position. On the other hand, if students and faculty value qualifications that vary greatly from those that administrators seek, students may be advised by faculty to submit resumes and portfolios that are missing components vital to keeping them in the running for library media positions. This study provides further evidence of how the expectations of others come to bear on the professional identity construction of LMSs, even before they have gained their first school library position.

The lack of clarity that surrounds the definitions, practice and future of the library media profession was clearly illustrated by a Delphi study conducted by Bush and Jones (2010) in an effort to develop a set of dispositions of the ideal LMS. The Delphi method, originally developed by the Rand Corporation as a forecasting tool, has been used extensively in both business and military settings. The Delphi method utilizes a panel of experts who respond anonymously to a query; responses are summarized by a facilitator and then returned to the panel for repeated rounds of responses. The number of iterations is determined by the researcher based on “consensus or an acceptable level agreement” (Bush & Jones, 2010, The Delphi Study, para. 4). The motivation for the project stemmed from a number of circumstances: the inclusion of dispositions in the American Association of School Librarian’s (2007) *Standards for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century learner*; heightened expectations for LMSs’ performance as a result of the *Standards*; the identification of dispositions as indicators of teacher quality by a number of professional organizations; an observable lack of dispositions or ways to assess them in the field of library media;

and the uneasiness surrounding professional obsolescence, ineffective practice, and loss of jobs that exists in the school library world.

Bush and Jones claim that there is little published guidance as to the proper methods for selecting subjects for a Delphi study. Okoli and Pawlowski (2004), however, provide detailed guidelines on how best to identify experts for panel participation. The participants in this study were identified by the researchers as experts in the field of library media and constituted the editorial boards of five journals in the school library field; no other explanation was provided to justify their selection. A total of 63 participants were initially invited to respond to the first request for input and a surprisingly high return rate was accomplished ( $n = 33$ ). Round one results, after compilation and summarization by the facilitators, were sent back to the 33 respondents who were again invited to share reactions or thoughts. Responses were received from 17 participants during round two. After more compilation and editing by the researchers, the list of dispositions was sent out again to the 33. The final iteration asked the panelists to engage with the data in a number of ways: they could order the dispositions identified as critically important to least important, combine dispositions if they felt it warranted, or change the term used to identify the disposition. The researchers received 21 responses to the third round.

The response rate to this study was extremely high. The researchers explain that participation in Delphi studies often garner high rates of participation because of the relative ease, reduced time and travel expenditures, and anonymity inherent in the procedure. Data gathered during the study appears to have been robust, with the panelists giving freely of their heartfelt opinions and predictions for the field of library media. Bush and Jones report that the complexity of defining “disposition”

and the affective nature of the task at hand caused some of the panelists to feel uneasy and to respond with a variety of emotions. It would have been enlightening if the authors had published more of the panelists' comments that indicated their struggles with the concept of dispositions; how dispositions differ from characteristics or traits is a complex idea that, if difficult for a panel of experts to grasp, may cause increased confusion on the parts of practitioners who are examining themselves for evidence of such dispositions. In the discussion of their conclusions, the researchers identified three outcomes of the Delphi panel's work: 1) a vision of professional dispositions of school librarianship that highlight quality teaching; 2) the understanding that discussion of dispositions caused a variety of emotional responses from the panelists; and 3) the critical need for further work on bridging the gap between the idealized vision of school library media practice and dispositions and those that exist in reality. Although the final list of eleven dispositions held few surprises, the emotional reactions by panelists to certain rankings within the list were somewhat unexpected. Some were quite dismayed at the place that *reading* took within the list (very low) while others were surprised that *teaching* repeatedly came out on top. This study points out the disagreement and perplexity experienced by experts in the school library field when asked to describe the dispositions most important to the practitioner. If a panel of experts such as these is challenged by this task and produces a wide variety of responses, is it any wonder that LMSs in the field are confused about how to prioritize their work, whose expectations to attempt to meet, and what impact they actually have on students? Chisholm and Ely's 1979 admonition to the school library profession rings true today:

The process of instruction will continue into the future, and those who are active in its design are those who will survive...It is possible that many of the functions which are now performed by traditional librarians and audiovisual specialists can be handled by clerks and technicians...Therefore, in order to justify a professional position, it is incumbent upon library media professionals to use the talents which they have to become active members of the instructional team. (in Neuman, 2004, p. 500)

Making sure that LMS candidates have the required dispositions (once those are determined), the appropriate education, preparation, and pre-service experiences, and are provided models for best practices in the field are the responsibility of those who teach in the programs that offer certification to LMSs. However, until the leaders in the field – professional organizations, researchers, professors, and practitioners – come to a research-based conclusion about the impact of LMSs on student achievement and the roles that best actualize those opportunities for impact, novice and experienced LMSs will continue to struggle to develop professional identities that serve to promote and support the continuing evolution of both the practice and practitioner.

### **Career Choice**

The career paths of school library media specialists were explored via a survey of graduates of five North Carolina library science master's programs (Solomon & Rathbun-Grubb, 2009). The data indicated that the prominent attractors to the field of school librarianship were fit with interests, opportunity to work with people, and making a difference while following the leads of friends and family, finding a fit between family and work, and job availability. Knowing that these factors were influential in the survey respondents' decisions to pursue a career in school librarianship provides clues as to the types of identity discourses that influence pre-service librarians. The helping and service nature of the job are

reflected in the attraction to working with people and making a difference while the influence of family and friends also factor into the career choices of future LMSs.

Stephanie Anne Jones (2008), in her doctoral dissertation, examined the reasons that five graduate students in a school library media program had for selecting the LMS occupation. Utilizing Savickas' career construction theory as her theoretical framework, Jones conducted multiple life story interviews and analyzed the data collected individually to create first-person career narratives for each participant. Additionally, a comparative analysis was undertaken to explore the existence of similarities between the five participants' stories. The vocational personality component of Savickas' (2005) career construction theory refers to an individual's career-related abilities, needs, values and interests. Before entering the world of work, vocational personalities begin their formation in the family of origin, the neighborhood, and school. Significantly, Jones found that the "substantial value placed on educational achievement by the participants and their families" (S. A. Jones, 2008, abstract) and the influence of a librarian on their career choice were common characteristics among the candidates. Jones also found common motivating factors to enter the field of school librarianship across her sample: the desire to work with children, flexibility of the school work calendar and schedule, stability and security, love of reading, and previous library experiences. Interestingly, Jones found, through the application of the Holland RIASEC personality type indicators, that all five of the subjects in her study bore the *Artistic* code as part of their personality make-up. She suggests that this finding should be taken into consideration during recruitment for future LMS candidates. *Artistic* individuals are typified as being "non-conforming, original, independent, chaotic, creative" (J. Holland, 1985). In the field of library media, where no day is the same, the LMS is

frequently “on stage” in front of a diverse and demanding audience, is often serving a large school population completely alone, and has very little contact with professional library colleagues, originality, independence, creativity and non-conformity may be valuable characteristics.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the title of the professional staff member who works in a school library media center has changed numerous times. Franklin (2009), surveyed school library media students at one Library and Information Studies program in order to answer the question, “What do future school library administrators (those individuals who are currently enrolled in school library media certification programs) believe is an appropriate title for their position?” (2009, p. 13). The idea that “job titles are a means of identification that cause others to form ideas about a person’s position or status” (Franklin, 2009, p. 13) provided the foundation for her inquiry. Results of the pilot study survey, which resulted in a small sample of 31 responses, indicated that pre-service LMSs have distinct opinions about what they wish to be called; the title *teacher librarian* was the most frequently chosen response. Franklin interprets these results to reflect the respondents’ belief that it is important for all members of the school community to recognize the LMS as a “trained, certified educator who is qualified and ready to deliver instruction” (Franklin, 2009, p. 17). Franklin suggests a larger, nationwide study which would allow “future library administrators to contribute perspectives that lead to establishing a solid identity for school library administrators” (2009, p. 17). Franklin, an assistant professor at Syracuse University’s School of Information Studies, points out that members of the school community, library information science professionals, and the public in general have a very vague understanding of

the value and roles of the LMS, underlining the identity crisis that exists in the profession.

Ironically, in early 2010, AASL issued a statement recommending the use of the title *School Librarian* for the profession. AASL cited a recent survey that “indicated confusion, misperceptions, and inconsistencies about various job titles in the school librarian profession” (American Library Association, January 16, 2010). The AASL’s press release states that, after extensive consideration, the AASL Board of Directors voted to adopt the “title *school librarian*, which reflects the roles of the 21st-century school library professional as a leader, instructional partner, information specialist, teacher, and program administrator” [emphasis added] (American Library Association, January 16, 2010). It is little wonder that a novice school library professional might have difficulty constructing their identities when there is still disagreement about what they should even be called.

### **Roles of the Library Media Specialist**

Over the last two decades extensive research has produced evidence suggesting that fully staffed and well-funded library media centers positively impact student learning and achievement (Dzikowski & Onondaga-Cortland-Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services, 2003; Jesseman, 2006; K. C. Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2000; Small, et al., 2009). Despite the empirical evidence, however, educational trend watchers, members of the library community, and professional library organizations have been recording and reporting evidence of the elimination of both the media center and its staff over that same period of time (American Library Association, 2010; Mesa Schools Eye Eliminating All Certified Library Media Specialists, 2008; Neuman, 2003). The most recent years have been especially dreadful for the school library profession; economic recession leading to

reduced tax collections and other budgetary crises within state and local systems have led to the cutting of LMS positions all over the country. The elimination of LMSs from school libraries, however, is not a new phenomenon but has been an insidious trend for many years and simply became more pronounced during this time of severe budget shortfalls (Ewbank, 2010). Why are teacher-librarians often the first to go when administrators must reduce their staffing budgets? A number of factors other than monetary shortfalls have impacted decisions regarding staffing in library media centers (Neuman, 2004). Although I will describe some of those factors below, I feel that underlying each of these is the pervasive misunderstanding among all stakeholders in the educational community (including LMSs) of what an LMS is and does.

### **Professional Standards versus Actual Practice**

In 1988 the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) published *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs (IP1)*, a document that detailed the three primary roles of a library media specialist (LMS): teacher, information specialist, and instructional consultant (AASL & AECT, 1988). This publication revolutionized the library media profession by thrusting the LMS into the midst of the instructional program of the school. Not only was the LMS expected to teach information literacy skills, but they were directed to become instructional designers. When this publication was revised and reissued in 1998 as *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*, these roles were expanded and redefined as: teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator (AASL & AECT, 1998). The revised *Information Power (IP2)* emphasized the need for the LMS to strategically position themselves within their

school communities in roles that still did not necessarily sit comfortably with the school librarian, particularly those of instructional consultant and teacher. *IP2* provided the blueprint for library media programs that would “help students become skillful producers and consumers of information along with the guidelines and principles that lead to dynamic, student-centered programs” (American Library Association, 2009). It was meant to guide LMSs in:

helping students flourish in a learning community not limited by time, place, age, occupation, or disciplinary borders; joining teachers and others to identify links in student information needs, curricular content, learning outcomes, and a variety of print and nonprint resources; designing authentic learning tasks and assessments; and defining your role in student learning. (American Library Association, 2009, para. 1)

Although school library educators and researchers promoted and embraced the vision of LMS as instructional designer and consultant, few library media preparation programs offered coursework in instructional design. Many LMSs found the new definition of their purpose, functions, and corresponding expectations daunting, unrealistic, or in conflict with their already-developed identities. As Coatney states,

Coming out of the paradigm that the mission of a school library was to circulate materials and provide reading guidance, the idea that there should be an actual program in place that would not ‘assist in’ or ‘provide for’ instruction in the use of ideas and information, but would actually ‘ensure that students and staff are effective users’ was a giant step forward for many in the profession. (in O’Neal, 2004, p. 289)

In the decade following the publication of *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning (IP2)* monumental innovations in information and communications technologies as well as changes in educational theory, practice and governmental intervention transformed the landscape upon which LMSs worked. Compounding the role and identity confusion suffered by many LMSs as they sought to meet these new expectations was the fact that many, if not most, teachers and

administrators had little understanding of what the LMS was supposed to be doing in their school. Research has shown that the collaborative, instructional roles espoused by both editions of *Information Power* and in other professional literature are rarely those most valued or assigned by teachers and administrators to the LMS position (Church, 2007; DeGroff, National Reading Research Center, & National Reading Research Center, 1997; Dorrell & Lawson, 1995). Kaplan's (2007) experience with an administrator who bragged about their school's LMS "because all the kids liked her and read such great stories" (p. 300) but did not realize that an LMS was capable of helping students meet state curriculum standards illustrates common perceptions on the parts of administrators regarding the roles of LMSs. Kaplan points out that in times of financial difficulty it makes perfect sense to eliminate a staff-person who only reads good stories, but eliminating an instructional leader is another matter altogether. Church's (2007) research into administrators' perceptions of the instructional roles of LMSs confirmed Kaplan's opinion that "what school administrators know about school library media specialists they learn from personal experience, not through any systematic education or exposure to the literature" (2007, p. 302). Church found that administrators' perceptions of LMSs arise from their prior library/librarian experiences, both good and bad, and form their expectations of present and future LMSs on these same experiences. Administrators who responded to Church's (2007) survey also stated that the primary responsibility for initiating teacher/LMS collaboration rested with the LMS. Church concluded that these findings indicate that pre-service LMSs should be prepared to "positively present and advocate for their key instructional role" (2007, abstract). DeGroff's (1997) research into the perceptions of administrators, teachers and LMSs of the roles and relationships of

the school librarian utilized the 1988 version of *Information Power (IP1)* as the ideal for practice. Survey results showed that administrators were in agreement with what the roles of the LMS should be as described in *IP1* but reported that the actual practice of the LMSs with whom they were associated did not match that ideal. In particular, the roles that fell under the heading of Instructional Consultant, such as participating in developing, carrying out, and assessing unit plans, were rated extremely low by both administrators and teachers. Administrators and teachers defined the LMSs' primary instructional consultant function in terms of their role in selecting unit materials. One respondent wrote that, "The Media Specialist chooses books, films and any other materials relevant to the unit I am teaching" (DeGroff, et al., 1997, p. 13). One of the most interesting findings of DeGroff's study was the importance of human qualities in creating successful working relationships between LMSs and teachers. The top three characteristics that teachers felt contributed to an LMSs ability to support collaborative partnerships were the librarian's knowledge, personality, and attitudes or interests.

Other research that investigated teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the roles of LMSs and their actual practice have echoed the disconnect between the ideal and reality that were apparent in DeGroff's study. In a 1996 study, Kinder (1995) surveyed and interviewed elementary LMSs regarding their perceptions and priorities and compared them with their current practices. The responses revealed that the majority of LMSs were not providing instructional programs and instructional consultant services to any great extent although they stated that those roles were important and should be priorities. Most distressing are McCracken's (2001) findings that library media specialists themselves often do not have a clear understanding of their role. In her study, she found that of the four roles defined in

*IP2*, LMSs still perceived information specialist, the most traditionally practiced role in school libraries, as the most important. Additionally, they perceived that program administration was next in importance, relegating instructional consultant and teacher to the bottom of the list. These traditional self-images and understandings of the LMS's functions run counter to the urgings of school library media "experts" to heed the research that indicates that an LMS who works as an instructional consultant, teacher and co-teacher in efforts to assist classroom teachers with the delivery of content and information literacy skills is integral to long-term student success (K. Lance, et al., 1994; Small, et al., 2009). The perceptions and misunderstandings regarding the role of the LMS on the part of all stakeholders serve to undermine the authority of LMS as instructional specialist. These misperceptions also hinder opportunities for LMSs' practice to have the beneficial effects on student achievement that research indicates are possible (Ross Todd, 2007, 2008b). Of particular concern, however, is the incongruity apparent in LMSs' perceived and practiced roles. Although LMSs report an understanding of the importance of their role as teacher, instructional consultant, and technology expert, they do not seem to be operating in those roles nearly as often as they are acting as reader advisors and resource providers (DeGroff, et al., 1997; Hartzell, 1997; O'Neal, 2004). The disparity between expectations and actual practice may erode support for the staffing of library media centers with certified professionals, as indeed it has in school districts throughout the country (Everhart, 2002; Jesseman, 2006; Whelan, 2003).

Hartzell (1997) attributes much of the failure of library media programs and specialists to live up to their potential to three factors: 1) lack of teacher and administrator training in what a fully functioning library media program can do for

students; 2) the fact that LMS work is largely “invisible,” or done in the shadow of individual classroom instruction, which is the crux of teacher and administrator training and experience, and 3) traditional library culture which does not encourage LMSs to “toot their own horns” or draw attention to the programs they have in place. Hartzell claims that “most students, teachers, and administrators don’t perceive library media specialists and library media centers as integral to their success” (1997, p. 26).

Moreillon (2008), a teacher educator and former LMS, devised a longitudinal, mixed-methods case study that monitored the growth of teacher education students’ understandings of collaboration with LMSs through their pre-service education, student teaching, and first year of classroom teaching. The participants were enrolled in a teacher preparation program facilitated by the researcher. Moreillon’s goal was to suggest critical components of pre-service education, student teaching, and first-year teaching experiences that would influence novice classroom teachers’ classroom-library collaborations. This study shows that interventions during pre-service education were important influencers on collaborative behavior. However, the findings clearly indicate that the educators serving in K-8 school library positions and the supports, or lack thereof, for classroom-library collaboration during student teaching and first-year classroom teaching were the most influential factors in determining whether or not these beginning educators collaborated with SLMSs for instruction. Moreillon’s research provided more discouraging documentation of the unwillingness of the LMS to step into the instructional consultant, co-teacher role, thereby relinquishing the opportunity to bolster their standing as a member of the instructional team.

## **Challenges to Role Enactment**

In addition to battling misperceptions among stakeholders in the educational community, LMSs have also been engaged in adjusting their roles and responsibilities in response to recent educational trends and technological innovations. Standards-based education, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), and the standardized testing movement resulting from NCLB have impacted school library practitioners, the definition of their roles, and brought dynamic changes to teacher librarianship.

### **Standards based education.**

*A Nation at Risk* (1983), the influential report on the state of American education issued by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, was undertaken as a result of a widespread perception that something was wrong with our system of schooling and that American students were falling behind their foreign counterparts. Among the Commission's recommendations was a move toward more rigorous standards in all content areas in an effort to "establish criteria for holding students, teachers, and school systems accountable" (Buttram, 1997, p. 1). Standardized tests were recommended as a means of assessing students' performance at the state level and were to be administered at crucial points in a child's academic career, essentially acting as "gateway" exams that determine whether students will move on to the next level of their education. States were encouraged to develop their own standards and by the year 1998 most states had put into place standards for mathematics and English/language arts, with other content area standards following closely behind. As standards-based educational reform was implemented across the country, teachers varied in their perceptions of its effectiveness and impact on student achievement (Hughes-Hassell & Harada, 2007).

Hughes-Hassell and Harada state that the 2001 Quality Counts survey undertaken by *Education Week* reported that teachers agreed, on the positive side, that standards-based curricula were more demanding for students and that teachers' expectations of students had increased. On the negative side, however, teachers felt that classroom instruction placed too much emphasis on standardized tests, that the state standards were far too broad to cover during the course of the school year, and that "teachers needed more support to effectively teach the standards, especially in schools with greater numbers of minority and poor students" (Hughes-Hassell & Harada, 2007, p. 21). As standards-based education became the norm in schools in the United States, observant LMSs began to reactively shape their identities and roles to conform to the new educational model. As they searched for standards for which they could claim responsibility they discovered that, in some states, information literacy standards had been delineated as separate "content" and claimed those topics as their own. In most states, however, those standards are imbedded in the major content area standards of English/language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies, leaving some LMSs feeling that "their content" has been commandeered by classroom teachers (Buzzeo, 2004) and reporting that "teachers, feeling pressed to meet standards, are avoiding the library" (Loertscher & Woolls, 2003, p. 6). Although the instructional model idealized in the library media literature that envisions classroom teachers and LMSs planning instructional, inquiry based learning opportunities with authentic assessments is touted by many as the most effective way to help students meet and exceed standards (Buzzeo, 2004; Loertscher & Woolls, 2003; Reed, 2005; Whelan, 2004), the reality of teacher reluctance to challenge or step outside of the traditional discourses of teacher control and autonomy has manifested itself in the diminishment of

perceptions of the library programs' value to the standards-based educational milieu.

### **No Child Left Behind Act.**

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001), signed into law by President George W. Bush during his first year in office, was designed to bring new levels of accountability, flexibility and choice to public education (Hughes-Hassell & Harada, 2007). By requiring states to develop accountability systems by which student achievement gains could be measured and compared, NCLB raised the bar for standards-based education and set goals for student performance that carried consequences for non-compliance.

The accountability systems required by NCLB mandate the development of rigorous standards in reading and math, annual administration of standardized tests to determine student proficiency, and disaggregation of testing results based on "subgroups" such as race, ethnicity, disability, and English language proficiency. These mandates are intended to lead to the attainment of proficiency in reading and math for every child by the year 2014 (Hughes-Hassell & Harada, 2007). Schools and districts, to continue to receive federal funding, must make adequate yearly progress (AYP) by reaching the annual measurable objectives (AMOs) previously stipulated in the legislation.

The pressure on teachers and administrators to produce ever-increasing student performance on standardized tests and the necessity of using "research-based" instructional strategies have led to what many call a "teach-to-the-test mentality" (Hughes-Hassell & Harada, 2007, p. 25). Because student scores in the content areas of reading and math determine whether a school makes AYP, those subjects have become over-emphasized while social studies and science have been

minimized, particularly at the elementary level. Narrowing the curriculum in order to cover only the subjects that are on the test also narrows opportunities for the LMS to collaborate with classroom teachers to integrate information literacy skills into the curriculum. Another negative impact of NCLB on library media programs is the proliferation of classroom libraries filled with leveled book sets included in many of the reading curricula being adopted across the country, lessening the impact that the LMS and his or her selections may have on literacy habits in their schools.

Professional library journals targeting school library practitioners are filled with advice on how the LMS can successfully navigate the new educational terrain born of NCLB. Reed (2005) admonishes LMSs to “admit that NCLB is real” (p. 56) and warns that if the school communities in which LMSs work “do not think of them as essential to the mission of improving student test scores, then LMSs risk being seen as irrelevant and their budgets may be reduced or their positions eliminated” (p. 56). Jones and Zambone (2008) propose that the LMS in each school can act as a “turnaround teacher,” one which provides at-risk students with an adult connection that boosts the students’ social capital and helps them build the resiliency that they will need to succeed in school and beyond. They tout the goal of NCLB – to ensure that previously marginalized students are given equal opportunity to a quality education – as providing a unique opportunity to LMSs to impact the neediest students by building strong library media programs that will touch each and every student. Their argument, however, seems hollow; they provide no evidence that the opportunity to build strong library media programs and relationships with individual students is intrinsically tied to federal education reform legislation. In fact, these opportunities have always existed and many LMSs have served as

mentors, supporters and turnaround teachers to all sorts of students within their schools.

Baule (2004) offered the perspective of a school administrator on the roles that the LMS could assume in an effort to help their principal reach the objectives mandated by NCLB. Among his suggestions were purchasing test preparation materials, becoming a test preparation expert, facilitating online learning for students who are struggling in the traditional classroom, and becoming a grant writer. It is apparent that this administrator, who admits that “many administrators are truly overwhelmed by the impact of NCLB on them and their schools” (p. 27), is looking to the LMS to contribute to the effort of helping students succeed on required standardized tests. Whelan (2004) follows this same train of thought by encouraging the LMS to find out what is important to their principal in relation to NCLB and finding ways to alleviate their principal’s concerns. Whelan states that “one of the main reasons media specialists fail to carve out a role in NCLB is because many haven’t taken leadership roles in their schools to prove their programs are a vital part of the curriculum” (2004, p. 42).

### **Summary**

The educational reform movements of the last two decades have created a teaching and learning environment that produces a considerable amount of anxiety on the parts of administrators and teachers. Making AYP has become the holy grail of education and many, if not most, educators feel that they have little time or inclination to creatively design authentic learning tasks that will engage students in the type of critical thinking so crucial to navigating the global/information economy in which they will live and work. Design of inquiry and project-based learning opportunities, an area of LMS expertise, may take a back seat to “drill and kill” and

other rote teaching and learning methods. LMSs are, in this environment, challenged to find their niche and define themselves in ways that justify their inclusion on the school staff list.

Faced with the vagaries and misunderstandings that surround the LMS profession, novice LMSs are challenged to develop a professional identity in a field laced with role confusion. Professional journals encourage LMSs to take on such a variety of roles with such urgency that new practitioners are likely to be more confused. Roles in recent literature that have been suggested as appropriate for the LMS are literacy development agent, independent reading and personal development agent, individualized learning agent (Haycock, 2004), change facilitator (Wehmeyer, 1987), reading instructor (Trinkle, 2006), the district's advisor on No Child Left Behind (M. Smith, 2002), chief technology training and support specialist (Anderson, 2008), collaborative teaching partner (Buzzeo, 2007; Haycock, 2004; R. Todd, 2002), and Web 2.0 guru (Brooks, 2006; Lamb & Johnson, 2008). How novice LMSs come to see themselves and inhabit the role of LMS has consequences not limited to their local school but to the profession at large.

Many of the studies investigating perceptions of LMSs and their programs, as well as the literature regarding the barriers to and strategies for accomplishing successful teacher-LMS collaborations, point to hindrances beyond the LMSs direct control (Gess, 2009; O'Neal, 2004; Ross Todd, 2008a). Citing factors such as time constraints, teacher resistance, lack of understanding and support on teachers' and administrators' parts, and fixed scheduling, relieving the LMS from responsibility for not implementing a library media program that is thoroughly integrated into the instructional framework of their school. Callison (2007), however, suggests that the primary question posed and answered affirmatively in the numerous state studies

completed across the U.S. - “Do school libraries work?” – now needs to be replaced by the question, “Do school librarians work?” Included in the provocative questions suggested by Callison are the following:

Would library media centers have substantially more impact if additional resources and staff were provided or if resources, instruction, and staff were managed differently from current practices?

Are there other approaches to multiple-resource education that result in greater student and teacher academic performance than through current library media programs?

Should a professional and academic field that can provide methods to implement a broad-ranging inquiry curriculum tie itself to correlations with basic skills only, no matter how strongly positive those correlations may seem?

How can information skills instruction move from irrelevant trivial pursuit activities to levels of inquiry that demand higher thinking skills? (2007, pp. 55-56)

Finally, the question that sums up Callison’s pointedly reflective inquiry echoes my own thoughts on the possible causes of the degradation of library media centers across the country:

“...are there many cases when the barrier to more time and attention for the instructional role rests with the resistance, unwillingness, and inability of the library media specialist rather than with the reluctance of administrators to grant time, encouragement, and funding?” (Callison, 2007, p. 56)

### **Identity**

The term identity, particularly in relation to the professional identity of teachers, has taken on countless meanings and interpretations in the literature. The definitions used in the social sciences and philosophy, such as those put forth by Mead (1934) and Erikson (1968), have informed the theoretical frameworks underlying research into teachers’ professional identities. These theories focus on the social contexts within which identity is constructed and the stages that

individuals pass through (Erikson, 1968) and concepts of self as developed through transactions with the environment (Mead, 1934). The concept of identity in the general literature seems to have one constant characteristic: change. Identity development is considered an ongoing process and as Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop (2004) state, can “also be seen as an answer to the recurrent question, ‘Who am I at this moment?’” (p. 108).

The concept of professional identity has been explored in the context of work domains as diverse as medicine, engineering, nursing, police work, law and teaching (Olesen, 2001). The professional identity of teachers, in particular, has become a topic of research interest in the last two decades, with identity being defined in various ways and investigated with a variety of goals (Beijaard, et al., 2004). Some researchers have related the concept of teachers’ professional identity to teachers’ images of self, while others emphasize teachers’ roles, or concepts such as self-reflection and self-evaluation which are deemed vital to the development of professional identity. Developing a feasible, descriptive and practicable way of defining professional identity for the purposes of this research is a goal of this section of the literature review.

### **Teacher Identity Influences**

Beijaard, Meijer et al. (2004) found in their review of the literature on teachers’ professional identity that studies could be divided into three categories: 1) those which focused on teachers’ professional identity formation; 2) those in which the focus was on the identification of characteristics of teachers’ professional identity as perceived by the teachers themselves or as identified by the researchers from data collected; and 3) studies in which professional identity was represented by teachers’ stories. The objective of this review was to describe the features that are

essential for research on teachers' professional identity as well as how the current research can be categorized. They also hoped to identify problems that needed to be addressed in future research on teachers' professional identity. The results of their review led them to the development of what they consider essential features of teachers' professional identity as defined by the literature. These features are: professional identity is an ongoing process, not stable or fixed; professional identity implies both the person and the context, as these characteristics do not exist in isolation from each other but are interwoven; a teacher's professional identity consists of sub-identities that more or less harmonize; and agency is an important element of professional identity. Problems identified in the review of research included a lack of recognition of the part that contextual factors play in the formation of professional identity in many of the studies, as well as the lack of definition and delineation of the concepts of "identity" and "self." Suggestions for future research include utilizing research methods less grounded in a cognitive perspective and more sociological in nature (such as participant observation). Additionally, taking into account context, teachers' biographies, and the ways in which teachers relate to other people are encouraged. Finally, it is suggested that the professional landscape metaphor put forth by Connelly and Clandinin (Beijaard, Meijer et al., 2004) may offer a framework for exploring teachers' professional identity.

Connelly and Clandinin (1995) use the metaphor of a landscape to describe teachers' professional lives. They describe professional landscape as being in "intimate interaction with what one might call landscapes of the personal, outside the professional setting" (p. 27). Teachers' professional landscapes take on a unique, particular shape as they draw from their own

individual biographies, on the particular histories of the professional landscape in which they find themselves, on how they are positioned on the landscape, and on the form of everyday school life on the landscape. Conversely, teachers' professional life on the landscape influences their personal life off the landscape. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995, p. 27)

In their book, *Shaping a Professional Identity: Stories of Education Practice*, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) share teacher and administrator narratives, allowing the narratives to speak for themselves. They assert that the stories that teachers tell provide a “special place and orientation” (p. 93) which constitutes their professional identities. They discuss the relationship between identity and curriculum/practice and assert that when the latter is changed, teachers' identities are threatened and they resist in an effort to keep the same story in place. Teachers' resistance to change reflects their need to maintain a story, or narrative, by which they define themselves as teachers.

Sfard and Prusak (2005) also feel that identity can best be examined through the use of narratives. In fact, they “equate identity with stories about persons” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 14). Their theory splits the narratives of one individual into two categories: actual identity, which consists of stories about the actual state of affairs, and designated identity, which consists of narratives that present “a state of affairs which, for one reason or another, is *expected* to be the case, if not now then in the future” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, pp. 18, italics in original). Designated identities are products of discursive diffusion – stories that we hear, pick up, and wear, sometimes without any awareness. These identities give direction to one's actions and influence one's deeds greatly. Sfard and Prusak claim that “a perceived persistent gap between actual and designated identities, especially if it involves critical elements, is likely to generate a sense of unhappiness” (2005, p. 18). It seems

likely that the designated and actual identities of novice LMSs may be in conflict with each other. The identities designated by others and expected by the LMS may not match in crucial ways, causing anxiety and unhappiness in all stakeholders.

Ongoing efforts to appropriately describe and characterize the professional identity of teachers have yielded a variety of definitions arising from equally diverse theoretical frameworks. Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000) asked experienced secondary teachers to rate themselves as subject matter experts, pedagogical experts, or didactical experts. Teachers were to indicate, by claiming that their professional identity was made up of certain percentages of each (i.e., 30% subject matter expert, 40% didactical expert, 30% pedagogical expert), which of these characteristics most represented their images of themselves as teachers. These categories were meant to encompass the characteristics that, in some combination, define the professional identities of most teachers. Subject matter knowledge is a traditional component of the teacher's professional knowledge base. Pedagogical expertise, in this study, describes moral and ethical dimensions of teaching such as the ways in which teachers interact and communicate with students, deal with behavioral issues and students with differing social and cultural backgrounds, and other dilemmas of teaching in modern society. Didactical expertise refers to the teacher's actual teaching philosophies and methods. The researchers concentrated on how teachers perceive themselves as teachers and what factors contribute to these perceptions. They also asked teachers to think back to their first years of teaching and rate their perceived expertise ratios during that time in order to gauge change in their perceived teacher identities. Factors that might influence teachers' professional identity were also measured and analyzed to see if there was a relationship between the factors and the teachers' view of themselves. These factors

included teaching context, years of experience, and personal biography. The results of this research indicated that most teachers see themselves primarily as subject matter and didactical experts and less as pedagogical experts. Teachers also indicated that, in their early teaching years, they had felt and acted as subject matter experts, but that they had shifted to a more balanced perception of their skills and expertise over the span of their careers. Most teachers saw themselves as a combination of all three areas of expertise, with subject matter and didactical expertise being equally represented. Pedagogical expertise was felt by very few to be the dominant characteristic of their professional identity. This research also attempted to measure and describe how factors, such as personal history, notable teaching experiences, and years on the job affected teachers' professional identities. The results were not considered significant, but Beijaard et al (2000) indicated that future research regarding how such factors influence teachers' professional identity formation could offer important insights into the experiences, attitudes, and professional identity of teachers.

In his seminal work *Schoolteacher* (1975) Dan Lortie documents the results of ethnographic research conducted over a period of approximately a decade (early 1960s to early 1970s). The data collected from 94 in-depth interviews of teachers in the metropolitan Boston area and Dade County, Florida, were analyzed from a sociological perspective in an effort to better understand why teachers teach, what effect socialization has on the formation of teachers and their identities, what rewards are reaped by teachers (both psychic and monetary), their professional purpose and goals, and how they assess their own performance. One of the most enduring conclusions of Lortie's work relates to the power of observation in shaping

teachers' practices, which he dubbed "the apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975, p. 61). He states:

Those who teach have normally had sixteen continuous years of contact with teachers and professors. American young people, in fact, see teachers at work much more than they see any other occupational group; we can estimate that the average student has spent 13,000 hours in direct contact with classroom teachers by the time he graduates from high school. (p. 61)

Lortie goes on to note that the widespread idea that "anyone can teach" (1975, p. 62) may arise from this fact. "What child," Lortie asks, "cannot, after all, do a reasonably accurate portrayal of a classroom teacher's actions?" (1975, p. 62). Despite this generalization, Lortie explains that there are limits to the kind of understandings a student can gain from observing their teachers and that imitation does not equal acquisition of technical knowledge or production of a reasonable facsimile of teaching in all its complexity. Lortie (1975) did conclude from his research, however, that because teachers frequently cited a teacher from their past as extremely influential in their decision to teach, that "the presumption is high that the remembered teacher is a strong model" for the student teacher (p. 63). Over the years, detractors of the American system of public education as well as teacher educators looking for a scapegoat have used Lortie's apprenticeship of observation theory to malign teaching and teachers with the conclusion that bad teaching begets bad (or worse) teaching (Mewborn & Tyminski, 2004). Lortie's work has been used to support the claim that "there is a cycle of intellectual poverty in teaching because future teachers cannot be expected to break away from the traditional teaching they have experienced as students" (Mewborn and Tyminski, 2004, p. 2). Mewborn and Tyminski point out, however, that "Lortie's exhortation that 'it would take complex research to confirm' (p. 63) that apprenticeship of observation exerts an immutable influence on the development of future teachers" (p. 3) encourages future research

on the actual contribution, if any, of students' observations of their teachers to their decisions to teach and their teaching practices. Mewborn and Tyminski (2004) analyzed journals kept by pre-service elementary teachers during their first weeks of a mathematics methods class. In these journals they found evidence that supported their claim "that pre-service teachers are capable of being analytical about their experiences during their apprenticeship of observation" (p. 3). The data showed that the "apprenticeship of observation" was not immutable; pre-service teachers were able to look back upon their own educational experiences, both positive and negative, and use those experiences to shape their own teaching identities.

The influence of socialization on the construction of a teacher's professional identity was examined by Britzman (2003) in her narrative study of two student teachers' experiences as they interned at two public high schools. This critical ethnography examined student teaching as a personal experience of learning and also as a social reproduction of perceived teachers' roles. The conflicted nature of the experiences of these student teachers pointed out that the system of student teaching in place at the time of the research worked to replicate many of the cultural norms associated with teaching, such as the individualization and isolation of practice as well as the idea that teachers are born, not made. Few, if any, opportunities for reflection on their practice were built into the internship experiences of the subjects. Additionally, the supervising teachers were unwitting participants in the perpetuation of the myth regarding student teaching being where a teacher really becomes a teacher. They helped to recreate the sink or swim hazing of their own student teaching experiences for the novices they supervised. The palpable feelings of defeat and frustration felt by the pre-service teachers in this

study and their perceived lack of preparedness for becoming classroom teachers led Britzman to propose a shift from a normative discourse of teacher education to one more dialogic. Britzman (2003) suggests that schools of education that have encouraged pre-service educators to see themselves and behave as teacher-researchers are providing “opportunities and strategies for the newly arrived to reflect upon their teaching dilemmas by constructing and studying their narrative accounts and the narrative accounts of others” (p. 238-239). A model of education that situates student teachers as researchers serves to build partnerships between those learning to teach, those already teaching, and the teachers within colleges of education. This type of discourse can “break down the isolation so endemic to the structure of experience in education” (Britzman, 2003, p. 239).

Britzman’s (2003) use of a narrative approach to both collect and represent the data collected in her study is reflective of a movement within teacher research toward phenomenological and ethnographic methods of exploring the life histories of teachers (Ball & Goodson, 1985). These methodologies reflect the acknowledgement and general acceptance of the idea that although teachers often have much in common, there are

important distinctions in attitude, performance and strategies which can be identified in different teachers in different times. To understand the degree of importance of these distinctions we have to reconnect our studies of schooling with investigations of personal biography and historical background...Through such a reintegration we might move away from studies where the human actor is located and studied in a manner contrively divorced from the previous history of both the actor and situation. (Goodson, 1981, p. 69)

Research that looked at teacher identity and how it is affected by social groups utilizing the concept of self and Mead’s “generalized other” was undertaken by Nias (1985) in her study of 100 primary school teachers. Nias claims that the “self

is a social yet reflexive product, shaped by the responses of others but capable of initiating behavior and reflecting upon it” (p. 105). In the formation of this self, “significant others” (parents, teachers, siblings) have a strong initial effect on an individual’s concept of self. As we mature, significant others are largely replaced by “generalized others” which are not, in fact, actual groups of people but the attitudes and opinions of others that help regulate behavior. Nias places the “generalized others” into groups referred to as “reference groups’, that is groups which individuals use for self-evaluation and as a source of personal goals and values” (1985, p. 106). She proceeded to explore the reference groups of the teachers in her study as they related to their definitions of self. Surprisingly, the most often cited reference group of these teachers was pupils. Students had the most significant effect on shaping teachers’ actions and values. However, other groups including in-school reference groups and out-of-school reference groups were utilized by almost all of the teachers as “perspective-confirming” (Nias, 1985, p. 116) devices as well as groups that helped define reality, created a sense of camaraderie, supported their commitment to teaching, and limited their isolation within the school. These reference groups were found to “simultaneously promote and impede the development of the profession and of the individual within it” (p. 117). On one hand, these groups provided support and helped to create an atmosphere of shared values and goals within the school; on the other hand, allegiance to a group sometimes inhibited experimentation and change by frustrating the “negotiation of shared collegial norms” (p. 117). The unmistakable conclusion of Nias’ research was that her subjects’ professional identities were heavily influenced by the reference groups in their social sphere. Nias’ research directly informs the question of LMS identity formation, as I believe that such reference groups may bear a strong influence on the

novice LMS as they begin to practice and identify with their new profession. The pressure to conform to norms and beliefs held by the school community can be overwhelming and may have long-lasting effects on the practice and beliefs of the novice.

There is general agreement that contexts of teaching and types of pre-service education can be influential on novice teachers' practice. Smith (2005) examined how early life history impacted science teachers' beliefs and behavior as "learners and knowers of science" (p. 5) and discovered that early out-of-school experiences are potentially more influential than teachers' formal classroom experience in shaping their beliefs about teaching and learning. The purpose of this case study of two elementary teachers who had graduated from the same program and followed almost identical courses of study was designed to examine the relationship between elementary teachers' beliefs about science, science teaching and learning, and the contexts within which they lived and worked. However, the study evolved into an examination of how the *school-based* contexts of the teachers' science instruction and the beliefs that guided their practice were "profoundly influenced by a number of other contexts – including those of the local community, the school district, the state system of education, the national context of science education reform, and the multiple other contexts" of these teachers' personal and professional lives. In particular, personal history, including formal and informal school settings and family experience, were found to be of particular importance to the ways in which these teachers perceived and enacted their roles as science teachers. Smith recommends that the results of this study should encourage teacher educators to acknowledge the impact of the deeply held beliefs that pre-service teachers bring with them as they enter teacher education programs.

## Identity Defined

James Paul Gee, sociolinguist, expert in discourse analysis, and powerful voice in the emerging field of New Literacy studies, has developed a theory of identity that defines four categories of identity: 1) Nature-identity; 2) Institution-identity; 3) Discourse-identity; and 4) Affinity-identity (2000). Gee stresses that these identities do not exist separately from each other but “interrelate in complex and important ways” (Gee, 2000, p. 101) and provide a framework for analyzing the different ways in which identities are formed. The source of Nature identity (or N-identity) is a force (i.e., nature, genes) over which the individual has no control. Gee gives the example of his own identity as an identical twin as a Nature-identity; his twin-ness is part of who he is but is not an identity that he accomplished or was assigned to him by society or an institution, but is a product of nature.

Institutional identities (I-identity) are those whose source is an institution or set of authorities. Gee provides another personal example in his own identity as a university professor. Without the authorization of the university authorities that approved his employment as a professor, he would not hold this particular identity. It is not something that nature gave him but an identity that he is “authorized” to bear by the institution in which it exists.

The third identity type – Discursive identity (D-identity) is one that has been utilized heavily by Alsup (2006) in her research with pre-service teachers. D-identities are formed through the discourse or dialogue of “rational individuals.” This discourse creates a description of an individual or group of individuals which they accept or have ascribed to them. Gee uses the

example of a friend of his who he describes as “charismatic” – one of the ways of looking at “who she is” (both by herself and those who know her) is that she is a charismatic person. This identity is not something that she was born with, nor was it bestowed upon her by an institution, but through dialogue and discourse among others and with others she has come to be seen as this type of individual. We will look more closely at D-identities when we discuss Janet Alsup’s research into teacher identity construction.

The fourth and final perspective on identity put forth by Gee is the Affinity identity (A-identity), an identity that an individual may assume through an allegiance to a set of common discursive practices shared by a group. The example put forth by Gee is that of the group of people who identify themselves as Trekkies – fans of the TV series Star Trek and the associated movies. If a person participates in activities or practices that align themselves with others who share their interest in all things Star Trek (i.e., attending conventions, participating in a blog, dressing up for Star Trek related events, etc.) then their association with the affinity group Trekkies is one way of looking at who that person is – their identity. An A-identity is one which an individual must actively choose to assume; it would be difficult to force someone to become a Trekkie or to join any affinity group to which they had no allegiance.

The embodiment of Gee’s identity types can only occur if a particular attribute is agreed upon as helping to define someone as a “particular kind of person” (Gee, 2000, p. 109). For example, if there wasn’t a characteristic, affinity group, institution or discourse that defined “librarian,” then one would not be able to claim *librarian* as an identity. Gee states that at a

given time and place, a person engages in what I will call a “combination.” A combination is some specific way of combining the following things: (a) speaking (or writing) in a certain way; (b) acting and interacting in a certain way; (c) using one’s face and body in a certain way; (d) dressing in a certain way; (e) feeling, believing and valuing in a certain way; and (f) using objects, tools, or technologies (i.e., “things”) in a certain way. (Gee, 2000, p. 109)

These combinations may be conscious efforts on the part of an individual to be seen and recognized in a certain way (i.e., as a librarian) or unconscious opportunities for that individual to be placed in a certain category because of the combination they are enacting (Gee, 2000).

Jane Alsup (2006), in *Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces*, documents the results of a two and half year research project that involved in-depth interviews and discourse analyses of a variety of texts produced by six pre-service secondary school teachers. Alsup draws attention to the critical need for pre-service teachers to develop professional identities that successfully negotiate the often tense interactions between various discourses that surround novice teachers. Adopting Gee’s “borderland” discourse analogy, Alsup describes this discourse as one which functions to allow the pre-service teachers’ experimentation with a professional teacher identity, hopefully arriving at one that is both true to their personal beliefs and effective in the professional setting. Alsup’s critical evaluation of teacher education and how it has historically failed to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to begin examining the conflicting ideologies they encounter during their training leads her to suggest methods by which teacher educators can create environments within their classrooms that encourage such self-reflection and introspection. Discourses that produce tension were those that reflected conflict between the student and teacher selves, personal beliefs and professional expectations, and ways of thinking about teaching that originated at

the university level versus the realities of the public school setting. These tensions were found to influence the outcomes of teacher training; the more tension, the more likely the candidate would abandon teaching. The results of this study indicate a vital need for teacher educators to guide pre-service teachers in their examination of their personal, historical, experiential, and familial philosophies regarding what a teacher is and does. I speculate that an examination of the discourses surrounding school librarianship would support the development of programs and strategies to be implemented at the pre-service level that could help guide students' through their inevitable encounters with conflicting ideologies.

### **Figured Worlds**

In their groundbreaking book, *Identity and Agency in Cultural World*, Holland et al. (1998) introduced the concept of figured worlds which is a part of their larger theory of self and identity. The theory draws upon a number of schools of thought, such as culturalism and constructivism, and from the work of Mead, Bakhtin and Vygotsky (Urrieta, 2007). In June 2007, a special issue of *The Urban Review* (Vol. 39, No. 2) was devoted to research that focused on different “social contexts of education and how the worlds formed in these contexts helped shape how people came to make sense of themselves in these worlds and in society” (Urrieta, 2007, p. 107). Several of the articles contained therein informed my own conceptualization of how the figured worlds that novice LMSs participate in could affect how they come to understand themselves as they embark on their new careers and attempt to find their place within the context of their schools. Rubin's (2007) study explored the figured world of learning at an urban high school with two goals: 1) to reframe the persistent phenomena of the failure of poor students of color in urban schools; and 2) to apply the concept of figured worlds and positional identities

to research on learning and identity in order to expand the use of these concepts. She analyzed the complex interactions and practices that supported the idea that student failure in urban schools is a result of inadequacies on the part of the students and their families. This analysis led to an understanding of how the figured world of urban education makes available limited learning opportunities, identities, and outcomes. The students at the high school studied “came to understand themselves as learners, and, indeed, learning itself, through the regularities and expectations of this setting” (Rubin, 2007, p. 245). Rubin found that the conceptual frame of figured worlds was a useful for “illuminating how everyday activities and events become part of identity production and, in this case, the reproduction of social inequalities” (Rubin, 2007, p. 245).

Hatt (2007) examined how marginalized, urban youth “figured” smartness and their own identities as “book smart” or “street smart.” Although the participants in the study were enrolled in a program for students who had dropped out or been expelled from school and were working toward a GED while gaining employment skills, the “book smarts” they felt like they needed to be successful in school were less important than the “street smarts” that enabled them to survive in the social setting in which they lived and worked. The implications for schools and pedagogy were discussed.

Urrieta (2007) explains that the special issue of *The Urban Review* that contained these and other articles was conceived as an opportunity to showcase research that had operationalized Holland et al.’s theory in pursuit of understanding identity and agency in educational settings. Urrieta claims that the researchers who contributed to this issue found the concept of figured worlds to be useful in

educational research, particularly in gaining understanding of identity, self-formation and agency beyond the notion of labeling or affinity grouping.

### Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter has been chosen due to its pertinence to the research questions posed in this study: how do novice library media specialists describe or understand themselves as LMSs and what factors influence the construction of their professional identities? First, the literature dealing with beliefs, perceptions, dispositions, and competencies of those entering the field of school librarianship was examined. This research explored career choice, competencies, and perceptions of pre-service LMSs. Additionally, research examining the diverse roles assigned to the position of library media specialist, as well as how those roles are perceived by stakeholders in the educational community, was reviewed. The literature indicates that, although principals, teachers, and media specialists acknowledge or are aware of the LMS's professional mandate to act as an instructional consultant and collaborative teaching partner, historical factors, realities within the schoolhouse, and inconsistent expectations often lead to a disconnect between professional standards and actual practice.

The second section examined theories of identity and reviewed a sample of the extensive literature dealing with teacher identity. A variety of concepts or theories of identity have been developed and several were presented. Recurring themes across the teacher identity research are the ideas that identity is not static, is influenced by an individual's history, biography, reference groups, social interactions, and present context(s), and influences teacher retention, satisfaction, and performance. A definition of identity as a socially constructed view of oneself as *something* at a particular point in time will be utilized in this study. Additionally,

the concept of figured worlds will frame the contextual factors that impact identity construction among novice LMSs.

This literature reflects the ambiguities that exist in the understandings held by various stakeholders of the requisite competencies, focus, and roles of the LMS. The dearth of research into novice school library practitioner's challenges, behaviors, beliefs and attitudes during their pre-service and first years of practice indicate a need for further exploration of these topics.

## CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY

*Molly was on a quest: she had lost her glasses and couldn't see a thing without them unless it was right under her nose. She stumbled into a bookshelf and a book fell onto her lap. She never saw the sign that read, "Do Not Touch The Books – For Display Only." It was over her head.*

Carmen Agra Deedy  
*The Library Dragon, p. 18*

Throughout the century-long history of school libraries, library media specialists (LMSs) have struggled with defining their roles and purpose. Conflicting expectations on the part of school administrators, teachers, and LMSs and discord between what is taught in graduate library programs and the realities of practice can result in role confusion among new LMSs. Recently, the value of the school library media program and the professionals who staff them has come under intense scrutiny and many schools, states, and districts have eliminated the position of LMS from their mandatory staffing requirements. In the midst of this tension, the development of a professional LMS identity can be alarmingly difficult. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two illustrates the discord between the professional standards set for the school library profession and the actions and beliefs of school library professionals. The experiences of novice LMSs as they begin to construct their identities have rarely, if ever, been empirically investigated.

The purpose of this naturalistic case study informed by narrative inquiry was to explore the figured worlds of novice LMSs and how they positioned themselves within those worlds during their first year of practice.

The questions that guided this research are:

1. What are the lived experiences of novice library media specialists during their first year of practice?

2. What informs the construction of novice library media specialists' professional identity?
3. How do novice library media specialists negotiate identity within the figured worlds of school library practice in public K12 schools?

In this chapter I will describe the foundations of the chosen methodology, the context of the study, participant selection, researcher bias and ethical considerations, and the data collection and analysis procedures utilized.

### **Research Design**

According to Creswell (2009), when little is known about a concept or phenomenon due to a lack of research, a qualitative approach is recommended. Qualitative research is often exploratory and is suited to research questions that have not been investigated within a particular population or sample or for which theories have not been developed that apply to the group of interest. Unlike teacher identity, the topic of identity development among new LMSs has rarely been explored or described. Although the literature on teacher identity construction informs this research, the unique circumstances that surround the experiences of new LMSs, although recorded anecdotally (Ashworth, 2006; Buddy, 2001; Dickinson, 2007), require more specific inquiry. LMSs occupy a position in the K12 school building that few, if any, members of their figured world know much about. Very few LMSs become principals and many have shallow understandings of best practices in library media, the mission and goals of the library media program, or the skills and the professional dispositions and skills needed by the LMS. Few LMSs move from the library media center into the classroom; that migration is usually in the opposite direction. Parents and other stakeholders may have a rudimentary understanding of what a teacher is and does because of their own years spent in close proximity to

teachers in the classroom during their education; few spend that much time with an LMS.

The goal of this research was to utilize naturalistic case study methodology framed by Holland et al's theory of identity to explore the ways that novice LMSs negotiate the transition from pre-service to in-service, how they position themselves within the figured worlds of K12 public schools, and how they begin the construction of professional identity. Case study methodology allowed observation of the participants in their natural, real-life contexts and allowed them to describe how they experienced the figured worlds of the schools in which they worked and the types of LMS identities that were available to them. Yin (1998) defines case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). The complex relationships between the participants and their histories, current work situations, affinity and reference groups, and the figured world of K12 public education are all uncontrollable variables that are integral parts of the research undertaking. Case study methods allowed in-depth exploration of LMS identity construction within the figured worlds of the K12 schoolhouse.

Merriam (1998) has concluded that the "single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case" (p. 27). This study comprised four individual cases, each case consisting of one recently graduated LMS who was embarking on their first year of practice as a library media specialist in a large, urban public school system in the state of Georgia in the 2011-2012 school year. After individual case data were analyzed, cross-case comparisons were conducted to identify common themes.

This study is informed by principles of narrative inquiry as well. Narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that, "Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (p. 2). In other words, people's lives consist of stories. Riessman (2008) states that individuals and groups construct identities through storytelling. She quotes Yuva-Davis: "Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)" (in Riessman, 2008, p. 8). Juzwik (2006), in her commentary on Sfard and Prusak's (2005) article that equates story and identity, points out the complexities inherent in the use of their "identity-as-story construct" (Juzwik, 2006, p. 18) and attempts to operationalize this construct by defining story and narrative. Juzwik's conclusion is that identity is both discursively and extra-discursively created, thereby leading to the suggestion that narrative should be treated as "constitutive of identity," (2006, p. 18) and story treated as a "discursive counterpart of lived experience" (Sfard & Prusak in Juzwik, 2006, p. 18). Identity, Juzwik claims, is "never perfectly coincident to one's life story" (2006, p. 18). The combination of narrative discourses with extra-discursive elements such as gender, family members, place in birth order, etc., may be considered constitutive of identity. As the participants told about what they do and don't do, how they do it, and why, they were describing how they see themselves as library media specialists in that point in time. From the data gathered, narratives (stories) of the participants' first year of practice emerged; I have considered these narratives an essential part of identity.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot case study with one new library media specialist participant was undertaken during the summer of 2010 and continued through the spring of 2011. The impetus for this study was an assignment in a Qualitative II research methods class that was meant to hone interview skills. My interest in novice LMSs and their pre-service perceptions of their chosen profession led me to interview one subject who had been hired by the District in which I worked. Although school had not yet begun, I had access to this participant because she had volunteered to come to her school to assist with setting the library back up after a major renovation had taken place. That project evolved into an informal, single case study that continued throughout the participant's first year of practice. The study allowed me to refine my research questions, data collection techniques, and to practice some rudimentary data analysis. The results of this pilot led me to several conclusions: 1) exploring new library media specialists' pre-service perceptions could be useful in helping new LMSs anticipate and negotiate the difficulties inherent in first year practice; 2) in-depth interviews lasting approximately one hour yielded data that would be valuable to for answering the posited research questions; 3) additional data gathering methods would need to be identified to provide a richer description of the context of the study; 4) significant conflict between pre-service perceptions and actual practice was evidenced; and 5) the novice's practice was highly impacted by the fact that she was a former classroom teacher, her personal educational philosophy, and the culture of the school (or figured world) in which she worked.

### **Participants**

The four individuals who agreed to participate in this study had been hired by the Hugo County School District (HCSD), a large urban district in the

southeastern United States, during the months of June, July, and August 2011 to serve as library media specialists for the 2011-12 school year. These participants were identified using stratified purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) claims that this type of sampling facilitates comparisons. Because the participants would be working in the same district, they would have access to the same induction and mentoring programs as well as similar training and district-level expectations and supports. “In-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants” (Seidman, 2006, p. 55). The four were purposefully chosen from eight possible candidates working in the system. In my work with student and novice LMSs, I had noticed that they held a variety of beliefs and understandings of what it was to be an LMS and I questioned what factors led to those beliefs and understandings. I, therefore, wished to explore the backgrounds of a variety of participants with diverse histories who were going to be working in different settings. The characteristics I hoped to have represented in the sample were:

- The presence of or lack of classroom teaching experience
- Male and female
- Different racial or ethnic backgrounds
- Graduates of ALA accredited library schools and non-ALA preparation programs
- Graduates of face-to-face and online preparation programs
- Assignments to different level schools (elementary, middle, high)
- LMSs that would be working as lone LMSs or with a co-LMS

From the pool of eight new LMSs that were hired in my school district during this time period, I purposefully chose four who met the criteria listed above. In the group of eight, there was only one male and one LMS assigned to a level other than elementary. Ian, the only male, had spent the past nine years as a classroom teacher and had received a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) from a completely online, ALA accredited program which did not give him school library media certification. He, therefore, was working on a provisional library media certification; he was assigned to a high school. Lara and Maya had attended the same NCATE accredited college of education and both had received a Master of Education Degree in school library media delivered in a mostly online format. Lara had 10 years of classroom teaching experience and Maya had worked as a private school teacher and public school paraprofessional with a total of 8 years of school experience. Pam was the only subject with no school or educational work experience; she had completed a Master of Library Media program in a face-to-face environment. Table 1 presents this information.

Table 1

*Participant Characteristics*

LMS Name	Age	Gender	Race	Teaching Certification (TC) and/or LMS Certification	ALA or NCATE Preparation Program	Years in Education
Ian	32	Male	Caucasian	TC/provisional LMS	ALA (MLIS)	9
Pam	29	Female	Caucasian	LMS	NCATE (MLM)	0
Lara	33	Female	African American	TC/LMS	NCATE (MEd)	10
Maya	36	Female	African American	LMS	NCATE (MEd)	8

Although the participants shared the attribute of being employed by the same school district, the differences in their preparation and their employment histories brought depth and richness to the data. The number of participants (four) was considered both manageable and adequate for the purposes of this project. The other four new LMSs in the district were not chosen due to a variety of factors: unwillingness, redundancy of characteristics, or conflict of interest on the part of the researcher (I was personal friends with one of the principals at the school where one novice was placed). The participants agreed to be a part of this study of their own free will and was given an Informed Consent Agreement to sign. The Informed Consent Form and permission to conduct this research from the Institutional Review Board of Georgia State University are included in Appendix A and Appendix B.

### Setting

The participants in this study had just been contracted for the 2011-12 school year to work as library media specialists in four different schools in a large, urban school district. At the time of the beginning of this research project, the district was in a state of systemic disorganization with an interim superintendent at the helm and a fractious redistricting and school consolidation effort underway. Eight schools had been closed at the end of the prior school year and, as a result, the LMSs from those schools were displaced. The district had pledged that all staff from the closing schools would be assigned to openings in other schools and, in an effort to accommodate what was anticipated to be over-staffing for some positions, the formula the district used for calculating the number of LMSs earned was adjusted. The result was that several schools earned a second (and in one case a third) LMS, thereby creating openings that eventually were filled with eight new hires. Three of this study's participants (Ian, Pam and Maya) would be working in library media centers that were already staffed with a full-time LMS, thereby becoming part of a team of two LMSs. Lara would be working in a LMC as the lone LMS.

At the time of the study, the school district had approximately 90,000 students in grades PK-12. Approximately 89% of the student population represented minority populations (African American, Native American/Alaskan Native, Asian, Multi-Racial, Hispanic) and 70% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. Within the district there were approximately 78 elementary schools, 20 middle schools, 25 high schools, and one science center that had library media centers staffed with at least one full-time LMS. The participants were assigned to the following schools: Ian – George Washington High School; Pam – Mountaintop

Elementary; Maya – Winfrey Elementary; Lara – Brookside Elementary. Table 2 presents more detailed information about each school.

Table 2

*School Demographics*

School Site	Population	Ethnicity	Free or Reduced Lunch	AYP Status
Georgia Washington High School (Ian)	1,637	97% Black 3% Other	67%	Needs Improvement (NI)
Mountaintop Elementary (Pam)	1,085	99% Black 1% Other	79%	Did not meet AYP – Not in NI
Brookside Elementary (Lara)	937	53% Black 39% Asian 8% Other	94%	Needs Improvement
Winfrey Elementary (Maya)	918	99% Black 1% Other	49%	Met AYP

## Data Collection

The data gathering methods used in this study were interviews, observations, and document analysis. In order to explore how the participants thought of and described themselves as LMSs as they transitioned from pre-service to in-service, they were given the opportunity to speak. As Bertaux states, “If given a chance to talk freely, people appear to know a lot about what is going on” (Seidman, 2006, p. 8). Interviewing is a basic mode of inquiry; asking questions, listening, reflecting, and asking more questions (or, more simply, engaging in conversation) has been a method utilized by people throughout history to make sense of their experiences (Seidman, 2006). Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series structure for in-depth interviewing was used as one of the primary modes of data collection. This interviewing model, which combines life-history interviewing and in-depth interviewing techniques, provided a format by which the participants could reconstruct their lived experiences or their “history in person,” which Holland and Lave (2001) use to refer to the group of relations between subjects’ intimate self-making and participation in local practice

Chase (2005) suggests that researchers whose studies are based on in-depth interviews aim to transform the “interviewer-interviewee relationship into one of narrator and listener” (p. 660). Chase claims that the stories people tell constitute the empirical data researchers need to understand how people create meaning out of their experiences. Allowing an interviewee to become a narrator, Chase suggests, requires a framing of the interview as a whole with a broad question about the topic of interest. This broad question can only be developed by a researcher who has developed an understanding of what is “storyworthy” (p. 661) in the narrator’s social setting and context. The research questions I developed stemmed from my broad

understanding of the issues of identity among library media specialists and allowed interviewees to narrate their own stories.

Each participant was interviewed three times using an informal, unstructured interview format. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews took place either after work or on weekends at locations of the participants' choice. All interviews were face-to-face with the exception of one which took place via the videoconferencing tool Skype. The original goal was to conduct first interviews prior to the week of pre-planning in an effort to understand how they were thinking about themselves as LMSs prior to their actually entering the figured worlds of their schools. However, because staffing decisions in the District were not finalized until several weeks into the school year, I was unable to identify and obtain consent from all subjects until two weeks into the school year. Additionally, conditional approval from the District's Research Review Committee was not received until September 2, 2012. Therefore, initial interviews did not commence until the second week of September. Subsequent interviews took place in the months of October-November, 2011 and April-May, 2012. All first interviews were completed and transcribed before the next round of interviews began.

### **Interview One**

The first interview, which took place shortly after the participants began working as LMSs, gave me an opportunity to gather historical and biographical information as well as to explore the participants' pre-service perceptions about the job and their initial experiences during the first few weeks of school. Questions were posed regarding the paths they had traveled prior to entering the library media profession including: family background, education, hobbies and interests, work, and the process that led them to choose to become an LMS. Their visions of the ideal

library media specialist and what they do, ideas regarding competencies, and their feelings regarding their own suitability for the job and feelings about their preparation and readiness were examined. These interviews took a modified life history form; the participants were asked to tell stories of their lives in relation to becoming library media specialists and to share their initial impressions of the figured worlds of their schools.

### **Interview Two**

During the second interview participants were asked to describe their day-to-day experience of being an LMS. These experiences were also shared through short responses to journal prompts and allowed them to elaborate on those responses. Participants were asked about the roles they had adopted or rejected and the ways in which they were spending their time each day. This interview also began to examine how the figured world of the K12 schoolhouse shaped their LMS identities.

### **Interview Three**

The third interview took place in the spring of 2011 near the end of the participants' first year of practice. During this interview they were asked to make meaning of their experiences. Seidman (2006) suggests that the question might be posed as, "Given what you have said about your life before becoming a media specialist and given what you've said about your work now, how do you understand being a library media specialist? What do you see yourself doing in the future?"

Seidman further states:

The combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now, and describing the concrete details of their present experience, establishes conditions for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives. (2006, p. 19)

Participants were informed that each interview would be digitally audio-recorded. The first round of interviews were transcribed prior to beginning the next round of interviews. I transcribed all interviews myself. Transcribing these interviews provided me an opportunity to reflect upon the conversation and was the first exploration of the data. By transcribing and reviewing the recordings after each set of interviews, adjustments were made and clarifications and further elaborations requested in subsequent interviews. Sample questions for each interview can be found in Appendix C.

### **Short Answer Responses**

Originally, I planned to ask participants to respond in writing to a monthly prompt based on themes that arose during interviews or observations. Ultimately, three short answer responses were collected from the participants. This scaling back was a result of the need to adjust the research project's protocol to competing demands on the participants' time as well as the frequency with which I informally communicated and met with the subjects. I will provide greater detail on my informal data gathering in the Role of the Researcher section below.

### **Documents**

Participants provided a variety of artifacts that allowed insight into the ways in which they perceived the role of the LMS during their pre-service training and how they began to imagine themselves as LMSs during their first year. Assignments from their master's degree programs such as mission and vision statements, library media handbooks, lesson plans, web pages, and annotated book lists were manifestations of what the participants believed they would be doing as LMSs in practice. Lesson plans, brochures, and websites created during the school year

provided evidence of the participants' identity negotiations in the figured worlds of their school settings.

### **Observations**

Observations were utilized to provide greater understanding of the contexts of the study and to triangulate emerging findings. Also, specific observations were used as reference points in developing subsequent interview questions. Each participant was observed, at minimum, three times for no less than one hour during the data collection period. Some sites were visited more often for informal or job-related reasons. Field notes were taken at each observation. Observations also provided opportunities to have informal conversations with other members of the participants' figured worlds: teachers, principals, co-media specialists, media clerks, and students.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) declare that reciprocity is a characteristic of qualitative research and of feminist research in particular. Reciprocity requires a give-and-take relationship with study participants versus a "take only" relationship. The social interactions inherent in qualitative research provide opportunities for building of relationships that may have beneficial effects on both the researcher and the participant. In a best case scenario, the results of reciprocal research relationships would be the betterment of all; not only does the academy add to the existing knowledge base but participants – the communities being researched – will also gain knowledge and insight that can inform their practice and help create a better situation. Harrison et al (2001) write of the conflict between trustworthiness and reciprocity and the complexity of negotiating relationships with participants

during data production and interpretation. I, too, have struggled with my position within this research and wish to discuss this here.

During the year that this research was conducted, as well as the prior four school years, I served in my coordinator position as a mentor/advisor/teacher to new LMSs in the District. Part of my strategy for maximizing my ability to help and guide these novices was to make a significant investment in building trusting, honest relationships. In my general practice I spend hours on the phone, exchange multitudes of emails, make site visits, and conduct eight two hour-long classes throughout the year in which all new LMSs participate. Because I was planning my study and thinking about selection criteria for my participants, the beginning of the 2011-12 school year felt different than those that had come before. Knowing that I would not attempt to study all eight of the new LMSs that had been hired, I worried that I might treat my research subjects differently than those who were not a part of the project. Because I was committed to separating time spent researching from my time spent working, I planned to take vacation or personal leave on days that I made on-site observations. But would I spend more time on my participants' sites than on the other new LMSs? Would I offer them a higher or lower level of support than the other LMSs hired that year? In the past, I often shared stories of my own first year and other anecdotes about my own practice with the newbies. Additionally, I made efforts to get to know them personally and let them know me, sharing stories about my family, work, educational goals and philosophy. In fact, I often became friends with them.

Reflecting on these questions throughout the research process has led to some understanding of how being the "researcher" complicates the development of those trusting relationships. I did, in fact, end up spending more time at the sites of

my study's participants than I did at those of non-participants. I believe that I did not offer significantly different support but found the participants initiated contact with me and utilized me as a resource more often than the non-participants.

Interestingly, I felt that I gave a much lower level of support to all, partly because of my own self-consciousness regarding "favoritism" and partly because of other departmental activities that demanded an inordinate amount of my time. Because the 2011-12 school year was a particularly tumultuous one in the District, I found myself rationing my own energy and time in ways that I had not in the past. The depth and complexity of my relationships with Ian, Pam, Lara and Maya, however, has allowed a deep and intimate exploration of their experiences and, I believe, a unique perspective on how they began to think of themselves and behave in their LMS roles.

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of data analysis is to make meaning from the data (S. A. Jones, 2008; Seidman, 2006). Inductive thematic analysis was utilized to make meaning of the qualitative information collected in this study. Data analysis commenced immediately upon the completion of the first set of interviews in the simple form of transcription and was ongoing throughout the research period. Riessman (2008) describes transcription as an interpretive practice and outlines several methods for transcribing narrative data gathered from interviews. One method involves transcription that includes the interviewer's inputs where the resulting text is co-created, reflecting the contribution of the interviewer's own experience and perceptions to the story that is constructed. I used this method of transcription as I felt that an interview and the narrative created from it is a product of the situation in which the interview occurred and that the contribution of the interviewer to the

narrative construction through comments, questions, guidance, and interpretation should not be discounted. After transcription, I created follow-up questions for subsequent interviews based upon emerging themes and memos written during the interviews and transcription. Participants were provided with transcripts of each interview for their review, additions or clarifications, and approval.

Round One interviews were analyzed prior to beginning analysis of Round Two interviews. During a first reading of printed copies of the transcripts, I began to highlight emerging themes and note them in the margins. All interviews were read and preliminary notations made in the same fashion. A second reading and additions to those notes and comments were then made. Next, outlines were constructed of each interview based on potential themes that had begun to emerge as well as any thoughts or reflections that were noted during the interviews or immediately following. Reducing the raw data to an outline form allowed for easier visualization of emerging themes and comparison across units of analysis which, in this case, were individuals (Boyatzis, 1998).

Upon completion of the outlines of each interview, themes within each individual interview were identified. Once all potential themes had been identified, consolidated or merged for clarity, and listed, a codebook was created to define how these themes would be identified across all interviews. As rereading and coding took place, codes were collapsed and descriptions and indicators for each were developed. A quality code, according to Boyatzis (1998), contains the following elements: a label, definition, description of indicators or flags, description of exclusions, and examples. In order to test the validity of the codes, a peer reviewer, Dr. Neil Rigole, was given sections of interview transcripts and asked to apply the codes. The peer reviewer's feedback and suggestions to thematic coding were then incorporated into the

codebook. The codes were then applied to all interview data. Once all interview data was coded, the units of analysis (each individual) were compared in order to determine cross-case similarities and difference and to identify questions and topics that require further investigation in future inquiries.

### *Analyzing documents*

Prior (2003) claims that

a large part of identity work, as performance, involves documentation. In some cases that documentation may take the form of full-length books – biographies and autobiographies. More likely it will take less notable forms – assembling and writing a curriculum vitae, or filling out a job application, a census form....and exactly how people use and manipulate such routine forms of documentation to do identity work is a legitimate field for research in itself. (p. 103)

Prior believes that identity is a matter of dynamic performance rather than of static, personal qualities and that documents have a role in that performance.

Documents should be viewed as containing more than mere facts about identity.

How documents are used by both the author and reader in the construction of an individual's identity is what must be analyzed. How library media specialists have used documents to create and sustain their identities was the focus of analysis.

Documents that were analyzed include resumes, library media goals and plans, mission statements, library media handbooks, brochures, lesson plans, and schedules. During interviews subjects were asked to provide descriptions of the contexts within which the documents were created and the meanings they hold for them. The resulting narrative, as well as the contents of the documents, were read and scanned for themes in the same manner as the interview data. New themes that emerge through document analysis were be added to the code book or collapsed into related, already existing themes. Documents collected during Round One interviews

were analyzed concurrently with the interview data and documents collected during Round Three interviews were analyzed along with the final interviews.

Throughout the data analysis process, memo writing was utilized to capture connections made during coding and to record reflections on special circumstances, events, or comments that would aid in understanding the experiences of the participants. Memos were added to themes, codes, and quotes from interview transcripts and notes were added to codes to provide greater detail about why that code was particularly notable. The data analysis software package ATLAS.ti was used to organize all data collected and facilitated a detailed coding framework that made the focus of data analysis much less about document management and more about looking at emerging themes.

### **Trustworthiness**

The notion of quality and rigor in qualitative research has been hotly debated since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) with little or no consensus as to what constitutes a good, valid, trustworthy qualitative study. For many years, qualitative researchers felt it was imperative that the approaches, terminology, and values of positivist, scientific research be applied to qualitative inquiries in order to legitimize research results. However, many researchers believe that the quantitative notions of validity and reliability are not useful measures of quality in qualitative research and suggest trustworthiness as a more appropriate descriptor of quality qualitative studies. Sandelowski argued that leaving a decision trail for the reader so that they can track and verify the research process allows “auditability” (in Rolfe, 2006, p. 305) and shifts the responsibility for judgments of quality from the researcher to the consumer of the research. Some of the methods suggested for increasing credibility or trustworthiness include: member checking (Guba & Lincoln,

1989), peer review and triangulation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), and journaling and memo writing (Yin, 2010). I have engaged in each of these strategies in order to provide readers of the research a transparent and auditable trail of research methods so that they can judge the quality of the research based on the appropriateness of the methods employed. Data triangulation occurred through the collection of data from multiple subjects and methodological triangulation will be employed through the use of various collection methods such as interviews, observations, and written responses. Member checking took place throughout the data analysis process. Copies of transcribed interviews were provided to the participants for their input and approval. Narrative descriptions of the results of each individual inquiry (each participant) were sent to each participant for their review and feedback. Dr. Neil Rigole acted as my peer reviewer and was employed to verify the themes identified and to test the usefulness of the codes developed through the analysis process by measuring interrater reliability. More than one data source was utilized: interview data and documents were both analyzed and contributed to the findings elicited from this research.

### **Researcher Bias and Ethics**

#### **Bias**

A researcher's personal beliefs, interests, and values are reflected, not only in their choice of research methods or their evaluation of the data, but in the very choice of research topic. My personal interest in identity construction in novice LMSs is rooted in a number of factors. I, too, was once a new LMS. I began my career as an LMS in 1999 at a small elementary school in the suburban neighborhood in which I lived. This position followed two years of working in another elementary school library as a media clerk while working on my Master of

Library Media degree. My experience as a novice LMS definitely informs my thoughts and feelings about the research topic. I have made a conscious effort to bracket my preconceived notions through reflection and awareness. However, knowledge is created through the interaction of the researcher and the researched. Efforts were made, through frequent and honest self-reflection as well as journaling, use of a peer debriefer, and member checking to monitor my own subjectivities throughout the research process.

My interest in the topic of research also arose from the position I occupied at the time of the research. I worked as a coordinator in a department within the District that provides support to the library media programs and specialists. One of my primary responsibilities was to teach a “class” for LMSs that are new to the system, whether they are veterans transferring from other districts or brand new practitioners. In this class I attempted to provide new LMSs the information and support they needed to satisfactorily fulfill the obligations set forth in their job description during their first year. Essentially, I became a person that new LMSs could call when they encountered a problem or situation that they were not sure how to address. This work provided the impetus for my research; the research questions sprang directly from my indirect observation of a series of novice LMSs in the throes of role confusion and frustrated identity construction. I have been in turn baffled, surprised, impressed, elated, and mystified at some of the decisions made and actions taken by the new LMSs I have met but I had not had the opportunity to interview any of them in-depth (other than during the pilot project).

Researcher bias was also managed through the use of systematic, purposive sampling. The purpose of this research, to understand the circumstances and experiences of a particular group of people – novice library media specialists –

required the selection of participants who possess the relevant characteristics under study (being a pre-service or new library media specialist). Additionally, member checking was employed throughout the data analysis process, with participants being allowed the opportunity to review transcripts of interviews for verification and confirmation of accuracy. Once a preliminary codebook has been developed, Dr. Neil Rigole, acting as a peer reviewer, was employed to code samples of the data to determine levels of interrater agreement. Finally, through reflexive self monitoring I have tried to remain cognizant of the impact of my preconceived ideas on the collection and analysis of data as well as the development and presentation of results.

### **Ethics**

The purpose and goals of the research were thoroughly explained to the participants. They were asked to sign a letter of informed consent that informed them of their right to withdraw from the research at any time. The participants' identities will remain anonymous and the school district(s) and schools in which they worked have been assigned pseudonyms. All data that was collected is kept in a locked file cabinet in my office and/or in password-protected computer files that have been accessed only by me.

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before any data collection activities commenced. Additionally, the proposal was submitted to the Research and Evaluation committee of the District where the research took place in accordance with their policies and procedures.

### **Summary**

This chapter presents the methodology used in this study including data collection, analysis, study limitations and trustworthiness. As with any exploration

into uncharted territory, unforeseen circumstances and emerging discoveries caused some minor changes in course. The research questions guided me to use qualitative methods with data collection from multiple sources: interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data were analyzed and coded following Boyatzis' (1998) thematic analysis and code development model. A peer debriefer provided evidence of interrater reliability by coding sections of the data utilizing the codebook. Along with the peer debriefer, triangulation of data sources and member checking support the trustworthiness of the study. Narrative descriptions of the participants' first year as library media specialists were created from the data. The identity construction of novice library media specialists is an area of research previously neglected by academic researchers. Their stories are shared in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### IAN

*“No matter what happens, no matter what I do, I will always look better than him!  
And when it comes to judging me, I will always look better.  
Because I am not him.” Ian*

#### **Introduction**

The next four chapters tell the stories of the participants in this multiple case study. Although they share the common characteristic of being first year library media specialists (LMSs), the paths that have led them to the field of school library media and the experiences and contexts that impacted their burgeoning LMS identities are, in many ways, unique. In a study of new teachers' professional identity over their first two years of practice, Flores and Day (2006) found that the key mediating influences on the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of teachers' identities were: 1) prior influences, 2) initial teacher training and teaching practice, and 3) contexts of teaching. These findings provide the framework for examining the how the participants' LMS identities were influenced by their personal histories, pre-service programs and experiences, and the “figured worlds” (or contexts) of their first year as an LMS. Thus, each chapter contains the following sections: a) a brief biography which describes participants' path to the field of library media technology, including early influences and motivations; b) a description of the participant's pre-service preparation experiences and pre-service perceptions and expectations of the job; c) a description of the figured world(s) of library media specialists in the public, K12 educational settings they encountered; and d) a discussion of the ways in which these novice practitioners negotiated identity in the contexts of these figured worlds. Holland et al.'s (1998) theory of identity grounded my exploration of how the participants come to understand themselves, how they

“figure’ who they are, through the ‘worlds’ that they participate in and how they relate to others within and outside of these worlds” (Urrieta, 2007, p. 107). Although their stories differ, common themes that became apparent in the course of data analysis frame the descriptions I provide of their individual experiences.

### **Personal Biography and History**

Ian was one of only two new hires that no one in our office had met prior to the beginning of the 2011-12 school year. Although we do no hiring or firing, the Department of Media Services (the Department) in the Hugo County School District (HCSD), of which I was a staff member, usually prescreened library media specialist candidates prior to their interviews with principals for open positions in the system. Ian had slipped past us and had been snatched up by the principal at George Washington High School (GWHS). We were anxious to meet this new LMS because we were aware that he would be partnered with a veteran LMS at his school – a partnership that I anticipated might prove problematic.

Ian arrived at the new LMS breakout session at New Teacher Orientation late and flustered. I was immediately struck by his youth, good looks, energy and agitation. I would learn that Ian was usually on time or early to meetings, but had been given less than detailed instructions about where he was supposed to report for this session. He was outspokenly impatient with the disorganization of the day’s agenda and made it clear that he wanted to be shown that attending our breakout session for new LMSs would be a good use of his time. He looked at his watch frequently and seemed anxious to leave. This was behavior I would find repeated often – Ian made it clear that he had places to go and things to do outside of his job.

Ian, 32, white, male, and single, had grown up and attended public schools in a suburb of the eastern Georgia town where he later took a teaching position. His

memories of the library media specialists in the schools he attended were dim and dismissive. “They were nice old ladies,” he said. “Most of the time they were aloof. I mean, they didn’t have much interaction with us, I would say. In fact, I would say that in that part of Georgia media specialists don’t really seem to do much.” Ian felt that there were students, like him, who didn’t need a media specialist’s help and didn’t ask for it while the students who did need help didn’t ask, either. “I could find books on my own,” Ian said. His descriptions of the LMSs that he encountered during his own K12 education painted a picture of a group of people that he felt had little impact on his (or most other students’) educational experience and the role that he imagined them playing (if he imagined it at all) was to help students find books. Interestingly, his mother belonged to that group of people – she had been a teacher who made the move to an LMS career (“...beats being in a classroom”). Ian seemed, like many children, not to have paid much attention or given much thought to the dinner table talk about what his mother actually did in that job. At one time, when explaining that she had worked as an LMS at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, he felt compelled to add that

in some ways if you really want to when you get to be a media specialist...I don’t know if it will continue like this but...if you have reached a certain point in life, you don’t have to do anything essentially. You can pretty much just hang out in that media center, depending on the school.

In the early part of Ian’s first year as an LMS, he stated his belief that the LMS job was not very taxing or difficult and later in the year reiterated that belief. (“In some ways our job ... it is a cake job. I don’t care. If you’ve never been in the classroom ... I’m beside myself with how much less stress it is. How much easier.”) But his perception of what LMSs did or didn’t do was not the primary impetus to Ian’s move

into the library media world; that motivator was his desire to escape from the classroom.

In the 2011-12 school year, Ian was embarking on his new career as an LMS after having taught English for eight years. He began his teaching career in a middle school (“Six Flags with weed, riots, and pepper spray”) that he said had “riots all the time. Real riots.” After two years at the middle school he moved to a high school where he taught English to students in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. He considered himself a good teacher and described in detail the methods he utilized to engage and encourage students to go beyond the minimal efforts their other classes and teachers required. Ian’s extensive knowledge and love of literature was apparent whenever he spoke – literary allusions and analogies peppered his conversation. Although the students he worked with at the high school should have been “advanced,” he felt that many lacked both the knowledge and motivation needed to be successful in an IB program. Over time, Ian began to find teaching boring and frustrating and he became disillusioned with the educational system, feeling that his efforts to “do the right things” – grading fairly and honestly, not passing kids who didn’t deserve to pass – were not valued by the system. During his eighth year of teaching, Ian was inspired to apply to an MLIS graduate program.

Eventually I said I gotta get the hell outta here and I enrolled in a library school. That was the big talk. Get out of the classroom. Be a librarian. I’d like being a librarian. How do we get out of this?

Over and over in our interviews Ian, when reflecting on his career path, emphatically declared that working in the library media center was much easier, less stressful, and infinitely preferable to a career as a classroom teacher. Even when the circumstances of his new LMS position were not exactly what he had

anticipated or hoped for, he maintained that he would much rather be there than back in the classroom.

I can't speak for everybody else, but I feel my gig was a good one. I looked at the economic situation for most people in my age bracket and I'm doing just fine, thank you. If a little bit of boredom and frustration is all I got going on, hey, fine by me. I could do a lot worse. I could be in a classroom at George Washington HS!

His original ambition, inspired by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* where he read of opportunities, was to work in higher education - **not** to become a K12 school librarian.

I chose this job partly on the basis that I wanted to get out of the classroom, I like writers, I wanted to work at a university library. I really did. But, times being what they are, this has become a very hard thing to accomplish.

Having been influenced by his memories of LMSs of his past, those he had worked with as a teacher, his mother's experiences and guidance, and his desire to escape from the classroom, Ian chose to pursue a Master of Library and Information Science.

### **Pre-Service Experiences and Perceptions**

Two of the primary roles of the school LMS outlined by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), commonly accepted by the profession and taught in school library preparation programs, are those of teacher and instructional consultant. The assumption and expectation of AASL is that LMSs will work, in partnership with classroom teachers, to collaboratively plan and execute learning opportunities for students that encourage the use of multiple literacies (information, media, technology, traditional). The fact that Ian had never witnessed this type of collaborative planning and instruction, either as a K12 student in a school with an LMS or as a middle and high school teacher, provides insight into the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) that he experienced. Not only did he

have no memories of a school LMS working with him individually as a student or with a class in any instructional capacity, he did not perceive the LMSs in the schools in which he taught as being willing or available partners for any type of instructional collaboration.

We didn't use our media specialist, to get back to that. I remember one lady she said, do you want pathfinders? I said I'd like this, and she never got back to me. Essentially, what they did...they had her doing the yearbook. That's how she earned her check. And the other person, she was basically doing tech support. She was like a CTSS (certified technical support specialist). There were no CTSS people in Springfield County. The media specialist, she would go around and mess with the stuff. That's what she basically would do. She would control the budget. That's the only reason you really need to pay media specialists a lot - because they have access to money and if you don't they will rip you off.

Ian applied and was accepted to an MLIS program at a state university in the southern part of Georgia. The program was accredited by the American Library Association (ALA) in 2007 and offered a master's degree that could be obtained completely online. Because his original goal was to work in a higher ed setting, Ian did not take the requisite classes to receive school library media certification, which would have included an internship in a school library media center. He had somewhat mistakenly believed that his MLIS program of study would be sufficient to, along with passing the state's mandated certification exam, earn him a school library media specialist certification. "I thought I could just take the GACE test and get certified since I was already certified to teach if I had to and I did." However, because Ian's sights were set on working in a university library, he did not choose to take the classes geared toward working in a school and found himself having to apply for a provisional certificate once he found employment as a school LMS. The classes that Ian had taken in his MLIS program that he believed would be most helpful in his new position were the "running of the library" class (administration),

reference, research, and “how to present a lesson on a federated search.” In Ian’s early comments about what he thought of the job, there is a noticeable absence of a focus on collaborative planning or teaching with classroom teachers or the difficulties that might be encountered in attempting to carry out these roles. Ian was so eager to escape the classroom that it seemed the last thing he would want to do is envision the library media center as another classroom – one that serves every student in the building.

Ian’s initial job search was focused on university library positions. He discovered that those positions were, in the harsh economic climate of 2011, not plentiful or easy to come by. He looked at school librarianship as an option that had both pros and cons; positives were the summer breaks and relatively generous pay; negatives were the return to the K12 school environment and what he perceived as a lack of prestige.

The point is I might try to go to the public library system or the university systems here. But the truth is the public school systems...they have that money and that 2 months off. That is seductive and can palliate many issues such as prestige. I mean the other jobs, if you ask me, have more prestige.

Because Ian had taken no specifically school library-oriented classes or completed an internship in a school library, his beliefs about what the job would entail and what he would do as an LMS seem to have had their origin in his past experiences with the LMSs he had known as a student and a teacher, including his mother. He believed that the job involved helping students find books and “running the library” – a function that was vague but included the controlling of money. Ian’s recent experience teaching high school English still dominated his talk about himself professionally and was the foundation for his self-making as an LMS. Entering his

new assignment as the second library media specialist at George Washington High School, Ian seemed both nervous about and confident of his ability to do this job.

### **George Washington High School's Figured World - Context, Discourse, Culture**

Holland et al's (1998) figured worlds are socially organized sites where identities are produced. Urrieta (2007) says that "People 'figure' who they are through the activities and in relation to the social types that populate these figured worlds and in social relationships with the people who perform these worlds. People develop new identities in figured worlds." The figured world of George Washington High School (GWHS) provided the context and social organization that Ian was invited to participate in when he began his LMS career. Within a figured world, people are sorted and learn to relate to each other, and define themselves, in different ways. I describe this figured world in this section.

Entering George Washington High School, a flat fronted, brick, modern and utilitarian looking building built approximately 11 years ago, a visitor is immediately greeted by a "school resource officer" (SRO) at a desk with a clock and sign in sheet. A brief, business-like interrogation takes place ("Why are you here?" "I'm visiting Mr. S in the media center." "Is he expecting you?" "Not really, but I drop in frequently." "Do you know where the media center is?" "Yes, thank you.") and I am allowed to walk down the long foyer, through double doors, into the commons area which is currently empty (it is early in the morning – not lunch time) other than some unidentifiable school employees who are sitting and chatting (another SRO? AP? Custodian? Teacher?) and into the library media center. Once you have entered through the double doors, you must proceed approximately fifteen feet through what feels almost like a tunnel; a dark, low-ceilinged entryway with offices on one side that leads to a theft detection gate. "Welcoming" is not the word

that comes to mind as I enter. As I greet Ian, who is standing behind the circulation desk, which is situated just a few feet straight ahead from the gate, I hear a loud male voice barking orders to the two young men who had followed me into the library media center entrance.

“Gentlemen, shirts! No, not here! I don’t want to see your junk! Outside! Go to the restroom! You know the rules!”

This is Dr. Anderson (Dr. A.), Ian’s co-LMS. The “Dr.” before his name reflected a recently earned Ed.D. – an accomplishment for which Dr. A. insisted upon being recognized by the use of the title by all at all times. He is a short, stocky, African American man in his 40s who wears his hair in a short afro style. In the conversation above, he was admonishing the young men who had come to the LMC to pull up their pants and tuck in their shirts. They appeared slightly annoyed and stopped in their tracks. I reflected silently on the fact that I had seen much worse violations of the District’s dress code – at some schools boxers and briefs are completely visible with pants barely hanging on and shirts that couldn’t possibly be tucked into anything other than said boxers – the pants are too far down for the t-shirt to even touch. The young men being barked at in military drill sergeant fashion looked decently dressed in jeans and t-shirts; however, their shirttails were out and over the waistbands of their pants. As they tried to hastily tuck their shirts in, Dr. A. shouted, “No! I said out!” and the students walked back out of the library. I glanced at Ian, who said quietly to me, “Yes, that’s how we welcome our students to the GW High media center.” I asked if Dr. A.’s “tuck and pull” order was a school-wide expectation, whether the principal and other teachers enforced the rule. “Oh no,” Ian replied. Ian stated that no one else in the building seemed to pay any attention to it. In my observations, however, I witnessed Dr. A. taking it upon

himself to become the one-man dress code enforcement team. The fact that the rest of the staff (including the principal) did nothing to encourage compliance to this rule frustrated Dr. A. immensely. Ian, at this early point in the year, followed Dr. A.'s example and asked students to tuck in their shirts (albeit in a much gentler manner) in order to avoid an argument with his colleague over an issue that he felt deserved less attention and caused some students to avoid visiting the LMC.

George Washington High School is one of the larger high schools in the HCSD – approximately 1,650 students attended during the 2010-11 school year. According to the Georgia Department of Education, the population was almost 100% African American and 67% were eligible for free and reduced lunch. The school had not made AYP and was in year 4 of Needs Improvement designation according to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) criteria; the graduation rate for the 2009-10 school year was 53.6% - lower than the District rate of 58.7% and significantly lower than the state's average graduation rate of 67.5%. These statistics paint a familiar portrait of an urban high school serving low-income students of color and being deemed “failing” according to the educational culture and discourse that grants standardized test scores and other quantitative measures primacy. In the beginning of the study I had hoped to explore the figured world of public urban high school education at GWHS; I had a particular interest in how Ian would construct a sense of himself as an LMS within this “socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation.” (D. Holland, et al., 1998, p. 52) However, my understanding of the figured world of GWHS has emerged primarily from the numerous conversations and in-depth interviews that took place with Ian over the course of the school year. Observations in the LMC did not result in much data around the teachers' understanding of the library media center, its staff, or how they and their students could, should, or might

interact with them. Teachers rarely darkened the door at this media center; more accurately, over the course of the seven months of data collection I only twice witnessed teachers in the library – one to check in a piece of equipment and the other to use a computer. The teacher and student Discourses at GWHS remain somewhat obscured by a set of circumstances that had created a culture that positioned the LMC and the library media specialist in a very particular way. This space of authorship, the culture of library media at GWHS, is where Ian’s position within the school was negotiated. The figured world of the GWHS library media center had spilled over out of the policies, beliefs, and relatively unfettered practices of the veteran LMS, Dr. A.

As Urrieta (2007) states, “Figured worlds distribute power and teach their participants how power works explicitly and implicitly...In figured worlds people are ordered and ranked and power is distributed.” (p. 121) The power structure in a public high school is usually fairly obvious: the principal, assistant principals, and counselors are considered the administrators and wield the most authority, in that order. Department chairs, coaches, teachers, paraprofessionals, clerical staff, custodial and cafeteria workers all vie for limited power and a sense of agency. The library media centers and the media specialists who run them have historically operated, in HCSD, relatively autonomously. Dr. A., Ian’s co-LMS at GWHS, “opened” the library with another male LMS when the school was completed in 2001. During the ensuing decade, Dr. A. had four different co-LMSs, including Ian. During the year prior to Ian’s hiring, Dr. A. had spent a year alone in the library after his previous coworker transferred to another school and was not replaced by the principal. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I was concerned about how any new LMS would fare being paired with Dr. A. I had worked, four years earlier, with

the preceding LMS who had also been new in the profession. That LMSs three years at GWHS had been tumultuous, and she had transferred to another District high school library where she worked alone. Dr. A.'s previous colleagues had found him challenging to work with for various reasons. It was, in fact, difficult for me not to want to "warn" Ian of certain practices, behaviors or traits that he might find surprising or difficult to understand in a school LMS. I did, however, remain relatively objective at the beginning of the school year and stepped back to allow Ian to get to know Dr. A. and his new school on his own terms.

It was apparent during one of our first conversations, which took place just a couple of weeks into the school year, that Ian had begun to observe and make note of the prevailing culture in the building that impacted the use of the LMC at GWHS. He mentioned that students were frequently berated and spoken harshly to by his co-LMS and that many had already begun confiding in him that they did not come to the library often because they didn't want to have to deal with the type of verbal abuse they felt they suffered. Dr. A., who took pride in his military service and conducted himself in an authoritarian, militaristic manner, had rules and procedures in place for all facets of library usage that felt, to Ian, like barriers to attracting both students and teachers. On several occasions Ian called me to inquire if a rule that had been touted by Dr. A. as being a "school board policy" or "Media Services rule" was, in fact, a mandate or appropriate course of action. Oftentimes, they were not. In fact, during the first visit that I made to observe Ian early in the school year I spent almost an hour and half talking to Dr. A. about a procedure that he had in place for checking out equipment (e.g. laptops) to teachers in the building. Dr. A.'s primary focus was on protecting and maintaining the equipment inventory with the goal of keeping himself "out of jail" and in compliance with what he

believed were “board policies.” An hour and a half of discussion was not sufficient to convince him that, although his procedure was not “wrong” or even ill conceived, it was not supported by any district policy or rule. These matters were generally left to the schoolhouse to analyze and develop local procedures. Dr. A. was visibly disturbed by the fact that I was contradicting what he had already told Ian was a rule to live and die by. Ian, throughout this conversation, kept his distance and manned the circulation desk, dealing with students as they came in to use the computers in the LMC. This pattern of behavior was observed on subsequent visits. Ian was often at the circulation desk talking to students and helping them with computer issues; Dr. A. was frequently not in the LMC or in his office “taking care of business.” The dynamic of a senior partner and a junior apprentice was palpable and confirmed by Ian’s frequent references to himself as being new and his initial reluctance to speak out about practices he found counterproductive to his perception of the LMC’s mission and goals. In a conversation about Dr. A.’s practice of spending a lot of time burning DVDs of sporting events for the athletics department, Ian stated:

I don’t like how the media center is apparently always burning DVDs for athletic events. I think that’s a waste of my time. I’d rather waste my time my way. He’ll do it. But he wants me to do it. I mean, I will do it because apparently it’s what goes on there. But I really do feel like you all need to learn how to burn your own damn DVD. I haven’t said that to any coaches because coaches matter, and I’m new.

The LMS Discourse with which principal, other faculty, and students of GWHS had been shaped, in part, by their experiences with Dr. A.; those understandings, consequently, helped define the LMS identity that was offered to Ian as he joined this figured world. The following sections will explore that Discourse as it was revealed through the data.

## The Principal

Mr. James, principal, was beginning his third year at GWHS in the fall of 2011. When he had first arrived at this school, the library was staffed by Dr. A. and his female co-LMS, Missy. At the end of that year, Missy asked for a transfer and moved to another high school, leaving Dr. A. alone in the LMC without any assistance. One of the motivations Missy cited for moving had been what she perceived as unfair distribution of the workload; in particular she felt like much of what she did was “clerk work” – shelving, inventory, checking in and out – while Dr. A. performed few of these tasks. Mr. James was aware of the problems in the media center and knew that Dr. A. would not be inclined to attempt to offer a full range of library media services and programs working as a solo librarian. One year later, Mr. James was allowed to hire a second LMS and chose Ian. During Ian’s job interview, he expressed his desire for a more active media program. As Ian said, “All he wanted me to do was to get along with Dr. A. I mean, that’s pretty much the big one. He’d like to see more going on in there.” Knowing how Dr. A.’s military training influences his library media practice, Ian reflected on a comment that he made during the interview:

I told Mr. James during my interview, I’ll be a good soldier. He said, I don’t need any good soldiers. I understand his trepidation at that statement but I can be a pretty good soldier. I even did a mock “ha ha” salute. Little did I know in this context that would be kind of chilling. Oh no, not another.

Mr. James did seem aware that his library media program was not meeting the needs of his staff and students. He mentioned to Ian that he would like an orientation to take place. Dr. A. was opposed to conducting orientations – he felt that they should not be necessary by the time a student had reached high school. Ian attempted to meet the principal’s expectation while circumventing Dr. A. by

providing a videotaped orientation that was distributed to all grade levels. Other than increasing the activity level in the media center, few, if any, directives were issued. It seems that the principal's attitude toward the media center was one of benign neglect. Although he indicated that he knew that the program needed improvement, he did not observably take the actions necessary to bring about change. Ian says,

I kinda just wanted to say, What do you want? Because I can almost tell you what your problem is. He already knows what the problem with the media center is. And his actions say pretty much what his strategy is. He's got more concerns than in heaven and earth, and it's true, he really does. He can let the media center go because...is it really worth his time? No, it isn't.

In late April of the 2011-12 school year, Mr. James came to Ian's office in the media center to get him to sign off on his evaluation. This was the first and last time that the principal darkened Ian's doorway.

### **The Teachers**

The teaching staff at GWHS, according to Ian's reports, rarely approached the library media specialists for instructional support - "...they don't expect much out of us. Next to nothing." The functions that the media center served most often for staff were the following: computer lab for students, a repository for equipment that could be checked out (laptops, LCD projectors, etc.), and a photo/video processing service where digital images would be downloaded from devices and burned onto DVDs. The figured world of GWHS did not seem to include an LMS Discourse that included collaborative partner or co-teacher roles. Ian discovered early in the school year that teachers had little or no expectation of receiving support for classroom instruction from the LMS. In fact, he felt that teachers often made efforts to avoid the library media center.

A teacher, Ms. Britt, an English teacher, nice lady, when she does research with her students she will go check the books out herself to keep them away from him or to not have to watch him being an \*&%^\$ to the kids, and she takes them to the computer lab and that's how they do that. That's how bad it is. That's a lot of work just to avoid the media center.

Ian felt that the teachers' reluctance to use the services of the LMS was greatly influenced by their prior experiences with his coworker. When asked how things would be different if he were the lone LMS at GWHS, he answered, "Teachers would collaborate more, teachers would use us more..." Ian also felt that teachers, at the beginning of the year, were not sure how long he would stay and wondered if they should invest their time in building collegial, collaborative relationships. He knew that many wondered if he was "...going to be able to take this crap and get along with this man for longer than a year."

Although it appeared that the oppressive atmosphere in the LMC created by Dr. A. might be one reason for underuse of the facility and the staff, it was also observed that Ian assumed that the teachers at GWHS shared some of the same attitudes and inclinations toward collaboration that he had as a classroom teacher.

I think that high school teachers are a more independent lot. They have trouble collaborating with each other let alone me. There is no real cross-curricular planning. Which is totally something we'd like to do but there really is no time to do a good job of it.

A collaborative Discourse did not appear to exist at GWHS when Ian arrived. The reasons for the teachers' lack of engagement with the library media center and specialists appeared to include: a complex combination of lack of awareness of the possibilities for collaboration; an attitude of avoidance that arose from disagreeable encounters with LMC staff; an absence of administrative awareness and communication regarding the importance of the LMC program and LMS's instructional role; and teachers' feelings of being overwhelmed with the challenges

inherent in teaching poor, minority students in overcrowded classrooms in a high stakes testing environment.

### **The Students**

On visits to GWHS during the school day, the LMC was often found either empty or with only a few students using the facility. One group of students who did regularly frequent the LMC was the GAMA (Georgia Association of Media Assistants) Club members who helped out in the library. This group, led by Dr. A., were official helpers in the media center and carried out such tasks as shelving books, burning DVDs for teachers, troubleshooting computer issues, and delivering equipment to classrooms. Participating in GAMA had several benefits – release from certain classes, having a “service” activity to place on your college application or resume, and the opportunity to spend extended time on computers or with your friends. Several students expressed their pleasure in having Ian as an LMC at GWHS; they indicated that they considered him nicer, more reasonable, and more respectful of them than Dr. A. Few other students, however, found the LMC alluring. At many high schools, lunch periods will find the LMC packed with students talking quietly at tables and using computers to check emails, surf the Internet, or work on assignments. Although lunch did see an increase in foot traffic in the GWHS media center, it was not substantial. Dr. A. and Ian split being on duty during the lunch periods, with one going off to eat their lunch while the other manned the circulation desk. On one visit, Ian asked me to stay and observe the difference in the numbers of students who came to the LMC during his watch versus that of his colleague. Students did seem to prefer Ian’s way of speaking and dealing with them. Some told him that he was “the blackest white man” they knew – a high complement. Students did have the experience of being brought to the library to

work on research projects by their teachers, but often it seemed that the teacher did not ask for any assistance from the LMSs. If they did ask, it was usually for certain resources to be pulled and made available for the class. “Am I teaching when students are in the library? Sometimes. Often, the teachers appear quite content to have us in the background, for better or worse.”

A dramatic event toward the end of the school year shed an intense light on the students’ feelings about the library media center and its staff. Around the time of annual performance evaluations, Mr. James, principal, decided that a survey of the staff and students at GWHS about the library, its staff, and services would be useful in year-end conversations about the library media program. He asked Ian to design the survey and Ian, feeling that the survey should not be implemented by himself since he was one of the subjects, passed the project on to a business education teacher who assigned it to some students as a project. The students created a survey and made it available for both staff and students to voluntarily complete. When the window for completing the survey had closed, the students compiled the results and sent them to Ian, who passed them on to Mr. James. The administration of the survey was completed in an uncontrolled manner; there was no mechanism by which anyone could be blocked from completing the survey more than once; students could obviously influence their friends in their responses, as the survey could be completed both at home and in school. In the end, over 300 responses were recorded and the results were shocking. The students who took the time to respond obviously felt that the library media center and its staff had often felt hostile and unwelcoming. Students reported, sometimes in very graphic language, feeling berated and unfairly criticized; like they were not welcome in the library; that they were not treated with respect; that they were spoken down to; and

that the LMC had little to offer them that would warrant their having to deal with the negativity that they felt met them when they arrived at the library. These comments were almost exclusively directed toward Dr. A.; Ian, although new to the school, seemed to have endeared himself to the group of students who dared to enter the library and get to know him.

### **Summary**

The figured world in which Ian began his career as a school library media specialist was one in which the library and the media specialist that was associated with that library prior to his arrival was a place that was often avoided, ignored, and forgotten. Since the very opening of the building, the Discourse of what a library media specialist is had been greatly defined by the one person who had consistently resided in that space. Ian's biography, experiences, and pre-conceived expectations accompanied him into this figured world and interacted with the social framework that was already in place at GWHS. There were, however, groups and Discourse that existed outside of GWHS that impacted the identity construction of all of the participants in this study. All participated in a New LMS class that consisted of seven hour and half long meetings and were led by me. These classes covered a variety of library topics – some specific to Hugo County Schools and some that applied to the theory and practice of library media technology in general.

Additionally, a conference or listserv exists within the District's email system that connects all of the LMSs in the District and allows them to ask each other questions, provide helpful tips, share information about resources, and simply allow collaboration among the District's library media specialists and the Department of Media Services. These two groups of colleagues also impacted the ways in which all of the participants negotiated identity within the figured worlds of their schoolhouse

assignments. The next section describes the ways in which Ian confronted and negotiated his identity as a novice LMS.

### **Ian's LMS Identity**

Ian came to his first full time LMS position with a unique combination of biography, experience, and preparation: a mother who had been an LMS, his own teaching experience, and a lack of specific school library training and practicum. Early conversations with Ian reflected how his recent experience as a teacher had left him disillusioned with the public education system leading to his desire to escape the classroom.

I don't ever really want to go back - because it's a burnout. I don't think anyone can really understand the conditions that the times are likely to lay upon us. I would not want to be a classroom teacher under those circumstances that are coming.

When Ian originally planned his career change, the goal was to leave K12 and become a college or university librarian. As a result, during his master's program he was not enrolled in classes that would have focused his attention on the position of the library media center and the library media specialist in the figured worlds of students and teachers in public K12 education. Ian's belief that collaboration happened more frequently at the elementary and middle school levels and his encounters with non-collaborative LMSs during his teaching years had led him to a pre-service LMS identity that identified with roles that involved books, reading, budget and equipment management, and a general perception of the LMS as a person who did not have to "do very much." When questioned about efforts to collaborate or consult with teachers on designing learning activities or assessments, Ian responded:

Does any teacher really want me telling them how to grade their shit?  
Teachers like to control what they're doing. If I'm really in there collaborating

with them then I'm going to have to have some sort of theory. Do they really want me there?

As a result of his experience and training, Ian also did not see think of the

LMS as a teacher. Being a former classroom teacher with training as a traditional librarian, Ian felt that he was leaving "teaching" behind.

I like to think I'm good, but...? I feel like I'm doing as good a job as can be expected. Could I do better? I'm sure. But, then again, the performance of the media specialist really depends on...it's a unique position in education because they're not teachers. The teachers generally in high school are very independent. They really don't know what to make of the media specialist. I didn't even want to collaborate with the media specialist.

In the figured world of GWHS, an LMS was a person who was not a teacher,

who had a desire to run a tight ship and keep things strictly controlled (e.g.,

budgets, equipment, the LMC, students' dress and behavior), and who valued order

and obedience over inquiry and critical thinking. Some of these expectations were

easy for Ian to assimilate in his early days of practice; learning how to handle a

large budget and being steeped in "county policy" regarding the handling of money

and other assets seemed to be practical training. He stated,

...when he is there, I don't have a lot of control. But that does not trouble me as much as it might others 'cuz I'm brand new. For I am, in a sense, happy to learn and believe it or not, contrary to what people might believe, Dr. A. does know an awful lot about his job.

Well, I guess I can tell you what he's doing. He's doing a cover-his-ass and if anyone says...well, that's a valuable skill. I feel that he is good and he seems to have a lot of knowledge on maintaining control of your money.

Although Ian found Dr. A. skilled in some areas of library administration

that he believed were important, he was also aware that his principal had spoken, as

early as his interview, about wanting to see more activity in the library. It did not

take Ian long to begin to believe that the library media center at GWHS was

underutilized. Although he found himself not having to work very hard, he worried

about meeting the principal's expectations. When Ian tried to comply with the

principal's request for a student orientation, Dr. A. responded that Ian was "the

captain. You're flying this one." Ian completed the project and later reflected that the important thing was that the students had some exposure and that the principal would be happy.

They can see it. They know we're here. That's all. Mr. James is happy. I'm encouraging people to use the media center. He (Dr. A.) wanted to make it into some sort of a ..."we need to make it effective." It's called politics. Effectiveness equals pleasing people. It doesn't matter if we're successful. Chances are we won't be. It doesn't matter if we're successful. So long as we look like we're trying we'll be successful enough. That will please the principal.

At the beginning of the school year, Ian's understanding of the role of the media specialist was influenced by the principal's suggestions and his pre-service experiences. As the year continued, however, Ian began to monitor the email "conference" that existed in the District's email system where LMSs asked questions and chatted about trends and issues in school library practice. He also attended each of the four "New LMS" classes offered during the first semester by the District's Media Services department. Ian began to express an awareness of and frustration with the underutilization of the library and of his services by both staff and students. He described himself as being amazed at the amount of "clerk work" he was doing and feeling somewhat frustrated by the teachers' lack of interest in collaboration.

But there's only so much that I can personally do. People who don't want to use me are not going to use me. If I don't feel secure enough to go out there and thrust myself out there every day...first of all, it's my first year and I'm like, hmmm....

It seems like in high school, you make your job as the media specialist....if there's not a high demand for the books or the services you offer, you just kind of make it up as you go along it feels like. Because people aren't particularly keen to collaborate with me it's easy to end up spinning your wheels.

Ian shared samples of activities he designed at teachers' request and on his own volition: an activity sheet for a history class, an in-service on an online map resource provided for the social studies department. He knew, however, that he could be doing more and pondered how to drum up business for the media center. He entertained the thought of starting a reading incentive program, but with little or no funding and the prospect of having to create the entire program from scratch, that idea faded away. He felt that the library space itself was not conducive to instruction and believed that the arrangement of the room was a conscious effort on the part of Dr. A. to make the room "controllable." Ian stated,

I would like to teach. I teach whenever I can. But most of what I teach is how to attach files. I teach kids how to use GALILEO. I've shown them a couple of videos on GALILEO. I'm not really sure what else one can do. This media center is not set up for instruction. It's set up for control but setting up for control or surveillance does not necessarily make it set up for educating people about using sources like GALILEO.

It was not far into the school year when Ian began to express his concern over the role his co-LMS might be playing in the teachers' and students' avoidance of the library media center. In a conversation where he and I debated whether the LMS brought value to the school's overall instructional program, Ian alluded to his belief that his potential was being thwarted because of the existing culture of the school and teachers' understandings of what the LMS had to offer, based on their prior experiences. "Do we bring value? I could. I don't know if it's because of him or not."

He also began to worry that his development as an LMS might be adversely impacted because of the limited identity options he found available at GWHS.

Sometimes I wonder if his terribly domineering ways – he's not terribly domineering – but I wonder if it will stunt my development in a way. Because he really would do it all, you know what I'm saying?

And later,

I would've stepped up. But then again, here's the truth. We're developing bad habits in a way. I can say there are bad habits. But I'm merely responding to my environment. It's not like I came in with this attitude of "I'm not going to do it." But it's like, okay. Like when I collaborated with teachers, what they usually do is they take my ideas and they go and do them on their own. Then they come back after it's already done. And I say, well, okay. I'm not sure if that's what collaboration is really supposed to be but, hey. We'll take what we can get. Usually they just prefer that I act like a clerk and do things for them ahead of time. Sometimes I've written, well you know, little things that they don't want to do.

As the school year went on, Ian became increasingly frustrated with the opportunities that the figured world of GWHS offered him in terms of being an LMS. He was often bored, performing what he felt like were "clerk" or unskilled tasks, spending too much time smoothing teachers' and students' ruffled feathers and too little time instructing students on finding and utilizing information. He took some responsibility for these circumstances, making comments about being new, wanting to just observe for a year, and admitting that he wasn't really sure that teachers wanted to work with him at all or whether they believed that he was "for real." The themes of role confusion or lack of role definition, newness, non-collaborative or uninformed teachers, and apathetic students had another subtle sub-plot that had to do with race. Ian was one of the only white teachers on the GWHS staff. In fact, during my visits and observations I never saw another white staff member. Statements that indicated a feeling of "otherness" were sprinkled throughout Ian's conversations. On several occasions he mentioned his minority status within the building and indicated that he felt that his time spent teaching in a majority black high school had probably helped him to land the job at GWHS, understand the school's culture, and build relationships with both staff and students. He also thought that his racial difference allowed him to be both less threatening to and less threatened by Dr. A.

I mean, God knows I'm a minority in this situation, too. There's that. I can deal with him. I think a white male might be the ideal partner for him. There's no way I can feel terribly threatened or condescended to or undermined or disrespected by him. I can laugh it off. Now others who for various reasons - history or socioeconomics or whatever - are less secure in their situation or their feelings on the subject grow peckish.

By and large, however, the dominant theme of Ian's identity construction discourse was his determination to reject the LMS identity that had already been established at GWHS – the one embodied by Dr. A. My observations and Ian's experience indicated that the authoritarian, autocratic style that Dr. A. had adopted seemed counterproductive to building the types of relationships with students and teachers that would pave the way for the library media center and the LMS to more fully participate in teaching and learning at GWHS. Students and teachers seemed so put off by Dr. A. that they actually avoided the library. Ian also believed that the principal, Mr. James, had such low expectations of the library media center and specialist that all he had to do to win his administrator's approval was to **not** be Dr. A. "I can't imagine myself being like...one never can tell, but as long as I'm not Dr. A. I could probably have parties and happy hours there in that library and not get in trouble."

Throughout the year, Ian and I talked about the role of the LMS and what other LMSs were doing in their school libraries. I know he also listened and observed others in the same position, both in the New LMS cohort in the district and at conferences and other events where he came into contact with other LMSs. In order to obtain library media certification and to further his career opportunities, January 2012 saw Ian begin working on a Specialist in Education degree at the same university from which he had received his MLIS. The Ed.S. would be in the field of instructional technology and Ian, although attending online, began to read

and have conversations about instructional design and technology practices that were pertinent to his library media practice. As he grew more familiar with the routine aspects of the job, he felt more conflicted over the difference between what he believed should be happening in the media center and the reality of what was. At the same time, his assessment of Dr. A.'s performance grew more critical and he felt more frustrated over the principal's indifference and lack of involvement. Ian's belief that Dr. A.'s "craziness impact(ed) the functioning and the services of the library" was one that he felt should be self-evident to the principal, Mr. James. Ian was shocked that Dr. A. could have remained employed in the District for over 14 years while performing at a level that he perceived to be unsatisfactory. According to Ian, he and Mr. James had several informal conversations during which Mr. James shared that he wished he could keep Ian and move Dr. A. out. These conversations encouraged Ian to believe that his greatest accomplishment as a new LMS at GWHS was to be different than Dr. A. He said, "I feel like my major victory is apparently I am more fun than Dr. A.," and "I have made a major improvement just by not being him. By not being Dr. A. they do not avoid the library quite as much." Being liked, agreeable, not objectionable, and helpful became the dominant characteristics of the LMS identity that Ian was constructing.

During our last formal interview, I asked Ian what he would change about his job. The answer was

I'd change my partner. I would look for a veteran, if I could choose my partner. You would do if they were actually going to streamline things, you know? Someone, I don't really know if I need a veteran, just someone who's more...has a better bedside manner, who's professional, the good doctor, the one who makes you feel better, the one who interacts with clients well. He doesn't interact well. He does not have rapport - not at all. It is adversarial all the way. Give me a person who can do that and I would be perfectly happy. And all the other changes could fall from that.

Ian's ideas for how he would run the LMC if he was not constrained by a domineering partner showed his desire to make the LMC a more welcoming and student-friendly place. He talked about allowing food and drink, letting students eat their lunches, chew gum, and drink sodas in the library. He felt certain that that there would be a greater demand for his services and that the library would be the much busier place that Mr. James, the principal, desired.

I would be more active probably with the community because I'm sure I'd have more demands for my services. I'm pretty sure that that's just the truth. We'd have higher circulation across the board. Even now I sometimes check out to kids if they have fines. I'd rather have the book go out if they don't owe me a fortune. He won't even do that. This is a man who looks for any excuse he can to deny service and he calls it holding up of standards.

Ian, however, was convinced that the changes he desired would never happen. The battles that would have to be fought to bring about change did not seem winnable and Ian tried to resign himself to working under the same circumstances during the following school year.

Gotta accept. He is the institution. He has been there. He is like Joe Paterno but worse. I'm sorry, he's been there since they poured brick in the mortar. He made the GWHS media center – at least he thinks he did, and tacitly they agree. If he's there, nothing will change that much. That's it. End of discussion. Why waste time talking about what will happen if the sun doesn't come up tomorrow?

As Ian held himself up next to the example of school librarianship that was available daily for his close examination, he began to think of himself as an LMS in terms of being a foil to that identity. He was nicer, easier to work with, more fun, less antagonistic, more progressive, a savior. In regard to the changes he wished to make to the atmosphere in the media center, he said,

But this will never happen. There's no point in even having that discussion. That man will never let it happen. That would be easy – that would be like the light bringer. I'm perfectly set up to be a hero for these people.

As frustrated as Ian was with his position in the figured world of GWHS and his perceived inability to make significant changes to the position of the library media center and media specialists in that world, he was determined to come back for another year and continue trying. The attractive features of the job – summers off, relatively good pay, low stress and responsibility – continued to outweigh the negatives.

Well, I'm interested to see what my second year will be like with him. Because in my second year I will actually have more sure footing and I will know what's what and I won't have to sit there and smell out the lay of the land as it were. That's what I'm basically doing. Smelling out the lay of the land, meeting people, basically doing basics.

As the end of the school year approached, Ian was asked by his principal to create the survey that was mentioned earlier in this chapter. The principal was clear in his motivation – he wanted documentation of the students' and teachers' feelings about the library media program and library media specialists. Speculation had begun about the kinds of cuts that would need to be made at both the district and school levels to create a balanced budget for the next fiscal year and schools that had two LMSs began to worry that they would have to lose one. It was clear that Ian felt that he was the more attractive of the team that worked at GWHS and he believed the principal agreed. However, Dr. A. had seniority and Mr. James had never given him an unsatisfactory evaluation, a fact that Ian found perplexing. Ian definitely wanted to continue working as an LMS; he was through with the classroom and was determined to find a way to stay in the media center.

### **Summary**

Ian's disillusionment with the public educational system and his subsequent desire to escape from the classroom were driving forces behind his arrival in George Washington High School's media center. Although his original career goal was to

work at the university level, a K12 library media specialist position was a viable back-up option; Ian's mother had made the move from classroom to media center and the advantages of summers off and decent pay made the choice tenable. The professional identity that he expressed at the beginning of his first year as an LMS reflected his experiences teaching, personal educational beliefs, and biographical history that included his mother's career as an LMS. His pre-service understanding of the roles of the LMS were also constructed in his personal and teaching history; his impression of the work of a school LMS was that it was a low prestige and relatively undemanding career choice – one that would not overly tax his intellect or abilities.

The position of the library media center and media specialists in the figured world of GWHS at the time of Ian's joining the staff reflected the principal's and teachers' apathy and misunderstanding of the library media specialist's roles and potential impact on the learning environment and culture. Additionally, the school's priorities reflected their status as a low performing, urban, Title I school. This status placed teachers in a position of reacting to the demand for higher achievement on standardized tests and did not encourage cross-curricular collaboration, leaving the LMS out of the loop of instruction. Most significantly, however, was the pervasive understanding of the library media center's staff as being unwilling and unable to provide instructional support to teachers and students. The aggressively non-collaborative nature of the existing library media program had created extremely low, if not nonexistent, expectations on the parts of school stakeholders for the services offered by the library media specialist. Within this figured world, Ian struggled to create a new identity for himself as a library media specialist, one that included the ideas of LMS-teacher collaborator and co-

constructor of authentic learning tasks. The result, unfortunately, was a frustrating lowering of Ian's own expectations for himself as he attempted to adjust and conform to this figured world. Ian became focused on the idea that the staff and students liked him and found him more pleasant to work with; the identity of the "nice librarian," the anti-Dr. A., was the one he adopted.

### **Epilogue**

On the day that the Hugo County School District delivered contracts to teachers and other certified employees, the LMSs that had been hired during the 2011-12 school year, including Ian, were all informed that their contracts had been "delayed" due to overstaffing in the position. In all, six LMSs were not given contracts on that day. Contracts were required to be signed and returned within approximately 10 days; the department of human resources was waiting for all contracts to be returned to determine whether enough LMSs had retired or resigned to keep the six on staff. During that waiting period, Ian found his LMS identity thoroughly challenged. His confidence in his superior likeability, performance, and desirability as an LMS did nothing to counteract the cold reality that Mr. James would not or could not approach human resources in any attempt to convince them that the new hire should stay. Those days of waiting to see if a contract was forthcoming were extremely stressful for Ian, who had recently entered into a contract on a house. Conversations about whether the library media profession was going to remain a viable career option, about the District's attitudes toward media centers and specialists, and whether the position of LMS needed to be redesigned to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> Century teachers and learners took place among all of the LMSs in the District. Ian continued to feel confident that he would receive a contract because he knew that Mr. James had been pleased with his performance - and he

believed he was the preferred candidate at GWHS. Approximately two weeks later, after all contracts had been signed and returned to HR, all six of the LMSs whose contracts had been delayed received one. Ian's relief was intense and, although Mr. James had informed him that he would probably not be at GWHS the following year, he felt assured that he would have a job as an LMS somewhere in the District.

This was not to be the case. In late June, as the District's board of education attempted to hammer out a balanced budget for the upcoming fiscal year, a proposal to cut 25 library media specialists from the District was offered by the superintendent to the Board. Eventually, a total of 13 LMSs were laid off – one of whom was Ian. Dr. A. remains the sole LMS at George Washington High School.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## PAM

*“I do feel like having a partner has been weird for me.  
I don’t think I work very well like that.” Pam*

**Personal Biography and History**

Twenty-nine years old, white, and single, Pam looked younger than her age. Although she was one of the youngest new LMSs we had employed in the district in several years, she began her career as an LMS after trying several other lines of work. Unlike many other states in the U.S., Georgia does not require LMSs to have prior teaching experience or teacher certification. The choice to pursue a career in library media is often reached after a person has tried several other jobs. I have known school LMSs that had previously worked as bartenders, market researchers, communications and PR staff, law enforcement officers, editors, physicians, and engineers. In Pam’s case, jobs in theater management, live-in adult caretaking, and bookselling had preceded her LMS training. She was, however, no stranger to schools, children, books, and technology. Her relationship with each helped move her toward becoming an LMS.

Pam grew up in a suburban area outside of a large southeastern city and attended public school there. Her mother worked as a local school technology coordinator (LSTC) in an elementary school and Pam had spent many hours before and after school in the library media center while her mother worked. Pam had fond memories of the library and librarian at her elementary school.

I loved my elementary school library. My mom worked at my elementary school so I was one of the kids that was in there in the afternoons all the time so the library was one place we would hang out. It was really fantastic.

Some of the librarians I had when I was little inspired me. And my mom was always a teacher so I was at school more than the other kids and so

sometimes I would hang out in the library. I don't remember ever actually going to the library with my class. All my memories of the library are sort of on my own. But I had really nice, kind of fun librarians that talked to me about checking out books and treated me like I was smart and should be there. I really liked that.

Her memories of her elementary school librarian reflected a personal, one-to-one relationship that arose out of her hours in the library; her perceptions of the LMS did not include a teaching role. Pam did not remember receiving instruction from any of her school LMSs. She did, however, remember her elementary LMS openly praising her in front of other students for liking to read but not of being taught while in the library with her class. When asked about her high school librarian, Pam answered, laughing uncomfortably, "I can't even remember in high school who it was, honestly. I can't even picture her face or anything. And I was a kid who liked to read, so...that's probably not good." Pam's family visited the public library regularly when she was growing up and this is where she remembers getting the books that she read for pleasure. The only use she remembers making of school libraries was when she was working on research projects in high school; she didn't think she ever checked out any fiction from that library. School libraries and librarians, particularly in elementary school, seemed to Pam to have "made a difference" in students' lives. The nature of this difference seems to have been, from Pam's perspective, the library's position as a comfortable, safe haven and the librarian being someone who valued characteristics that Pam personified – a reader and a good student.

After high school, Pam attended a small liberal arts college located about an hour and a half south of her home town. By the end of her second semester she had decided to major in theater. Upon graduation, she was offered a professional apprenticeship with a well-known children's theater in the Washington, DC area.

After one year of long hours and little pay, she decided that the constant movement and job insecurity inherent in theater management was not what she was looking for in a career. After a short stint living with and working for an adult couple with Downs's syndrome, Pam returned to Atlanta and got a job at Barnes & Noble where she worked in the children's book department. This position put her in contact with children's literature and children; the thought of librarianship, school librarianship in particular, began to formulate as a possible career choice.

I was the children's lead there for four years. And that was where...I kinda had already been thinking about library, probably even since college when I was deciding I didn't really want to do theater. Like working...something with books. Actually, publishing was one of my first choices but that industry was falling apart just as I was thinking about getting into it and it's kind of a dying industry and you definitely need connections and need to live in New York and there was really no way I was going to do that. So I decided on school library which I thought, because of the teaching aspect and the getting to share the technology stuff with kids, I think that was why I was much more interested in school library than public library.

Pam did consider getting an ALA accredited MLIS which would have allowed her to work in a public or university library. She believed, however, that public librarianship would be "more boring. They don't do as much. It just seems like more checking books in and out and maybe doing story time activities." She was attracted to the opportunity offered by the school environment which would allow her to work with the same children throughout the year and, possibly, over multiple years. She said, "I like that at school you have the same group of kids that you have all year so you're working with them to achieve things. I like getting to know the same kids."

Pam chose to attend a school library media program that was in the College of Education in a large urban university in the city near where she had grown up. Housed in the Department of Middle-Secondary Education and Instructional Technology, the course of study for the Master of Library Media prepared students

to take the state certification exam and included all of the classes necessary for certification as a school library media specialist. Because the program was NCATE accredited, versus one accredited by the American Library Association, a graduate does not earn the credentials necessary to work in most university or public library systems. Pam's choice of master's program was influenced by her strong interest in working in a school.

That's actually one of the reasons I chose this path over a public library job – it's so important for kids to be able to find the information they need and share their ideas effectively.

It sounded more boring kind of to be just a plain librarian. And also the whole getting into an accredited school. I liked the idea of going to Big Southern University (BSU) and not having to move anywhere else and go to school. I think there's one at Georgia Southern or somewhere down there but I really didn't want to go there. And I don't like online school. I tried one or two classes at BSU online and I hated it.

During the summer of 2012, Pam began her job hunt. She had come by to meet the staff at the Department of Media Services in HGSD prior to going out to interview; there were several openings in the district for which we thought she would be well-suited. She had recently finished her master's studies and we chatted about the faculty and the program at BSU, where I was enrolled. Although Pam had finished her coursework and internship and had passed the state certification exam, her application to the professional standards commission had not yet been approved and certification granted. The bureaucratic red tape and timing of the issuance of her certificate resulted in Pam's not landing the first job that she was offered in the District. Although the principal at Brookrun Elementary was very impressed by Pam during her interview and recommended her for her school's LMS position, the Human Resources department claimed that she could not be employed because she was not yet certified. Several weeks later, Pam interviewed and was offered a job at

another, much larger, elementary school where she would be the second media specialist. This time, HR allowed the offer to go through.

### **Pre-Service Experiences and Perceptions**

Pam's experience working at Barnes and Noble played an integral part in her decision to become an LMS. She found that she enjoyed working with both books and children and was frustrated by her limited impact on and fleeting conversations with young people who came to the store to buy books.

Working at Barnes and Noble and getting to talk to the kids and being frustrated with the limited role I had. I was just trying to sell their parents books and I didn't get to...I would sometimes get to talk to the kids about what they like and tried to pick out more stuff but a lot them didn't really have time.

Her belief that books and reading were at the center of the LMSs job was reinforced by the librarians she had encountered in her own K12 experience who talked predominantly about reading and engaged in little that resembled instruction. She also spent one day volunteering in the media center at her mother's elementary school to see if she thought the job was one that she would like.

I went and volunteered at my mom's school for a whole day before I even applied to the program to at least make sure it's not something that I would hate. I don't remember the media specialist's name because she's not at my mom's school anymore, but she was really great. She talked to me and explained a lot more to me about all the stuff that she did and she even let me help teach some of her classes even though I was only there volunteering one day so that I could see all the different things that she did.

Some of those "things" were teaching reference skills and doing story time.

Pam said that on the day she was there, the students were learning about the almanac. When asked what she thought the job would be like, Pam answered, "Probably more like the regular public librarian but with a little bit more teaching - probably with the reference skills and things like that."

Pam encountered the concept of the LMS as teacher and instructional consultant during her master's program. The MLM program at BSU, at the time of Pam's enrollment, was staffed by only two full-time instructors who taught all of the required library media courses. Support from the College of Education's dean and the MSIT department had waned, although enrollment in the program was healthy, and understaffing impacted the program's ability to expand or evolve in tandem with educational and technological evolution. While Pam was still enrolled in the program, it was announced that after current students completed their degrees, the M.L.M. would no longer be offered at BSU and that no new students would be accepted. Although Pam was distressed by this news, the message from the professors in the program was one of continued enthusiasm about the integral, instructional and leadership roles played by LMSs in K12 schools. Pam was particularly impressed by one of her professors, Dr. White, about whom she said, "She was really inspiring. All of her classes were great and she seemed like she sort of knew everything. I don't know how she does that. She got me excited about it also." Dr. White had worked as an LMS for many years prior to taking the teaching job at the university and Pam appreciated her brand of practice-based, common-sense instruction.

Pam's expectations for what the LMS job would be reflected much of what had been communicated by Dr. White in several classes. Early in the school year, Pam felt that she had already drawn on knowledge that she gained in two of her classes in particular.

Administration and selection are probably the two that are actually most helpful. Administration was the one where it was very day to day - kind of this is what it's probably going to be like and that one was tremendously helpful - the one that best prepared me for what it was going to be like. And

selection was really good because that's the one where we talked about policies and all that kind of stuff.

Dr. White's use of scenarios as conversation starters in class provided Pam a preview of some of the types of issues and situations real LMSs regularly deal with: unsupportive principals, harried teachers who do not want to collaborate, lack of adequate funding, teachers who are unaware of the LMSs role and who think of working with the LMS as something "extra." Her pre-service beliefs about the LMSs roles and functions were also highly influenced by BSU's preparation program. She stated,

It really solidified while I was in the program about thinking about the information technology side of it. I think I was aware of that before but once I got into the program I really got interested in that part of it and feeling like that was an important reason to do the job. But I don't remember how aware of that I was before I started the program.

Students in BSU's MLM program were required to complete an internship of approximately 100 hours in a school library media center. Pam's internship experience was eye-opening. Assigned to a year-round elementary school in the central city school system, she found the "style" of the LMS, who had worked there for many years, to be very different from what she thought of as her own. From the way the library was organized (by genre rather than Dewey Decimal) to the lack of formal planning that took place prior to classes arriving at the media center, Pam was quick to identify practices that she thought she would definitely not adopt in her library. Her frustration was so great during her internship that she actually questioned whether she wanted to be an LMS. Pam reflected, "After the first couple of weeks I think one of my journal entries was like, do I really want to do this?"

Just little things like she kept all of her books sorted by genre, she didn't bother shelving them correctly really. But she didn't have a clerk and that's understandable but stuff like that drove me crazy. Kids had no idea how to look anything up. They'd come ask me for a book and I would say, did you

check the catalog? And they would just stare at me. They had no idea, not even a reference for that. Stuff like that bothered me.

Pam also noticed that the LMS rarely collaborated with the teachers; rather, she seemed to teach information literacy skills in isolation through the playing of games or other activities that the students found fun. The library media program developed by the supervising librarian clearly was in conflict with what Pam had been learning in her preparation program. At this point in her program, Pam looked at this as a failure on the part of the LMS to provide the type of instructional program that modeled the best practices that she had been learning, not as an accepted mode of operation in the figured world of that school.

As Pam progressed through her master's program, she began to encounter the idealized world of library media as it was represented in professional journals, blogs, and books. Pam already had begun to realize that this idealized image was in conflict with what actually took place in many K12 library media centers. She also was beginning to identify and understand the kind of LMS she wanted to be and how she felt about working with others. At the time of her hiring as a second LMS at Mountaintop Elementary, she was unaware that the staffing "formula" that created her position, a second LMS in a large elementary schools, was not exactly welcome by the senior librarian and administrators at the schools. If anything, they would have preferred to have a second full-time media clerk in the library. The figured world at Mountaintop would offer new challenges to Pam as she began to construct her identity as an LMS.

### **Mountaintop Elementary School's Figured World - Context, Discourse, Culture**

Mountaintop Elementary School is the largest elementary in HGSD; it is also one of the newest, opening its doors in the fall of 2007. At the time that Pam began

working there approximately 1,100 students were enrolled, 99% of whom were African American and 79% of whom were eligible for free and reduced lunch. Although the school had not made AYP during the 2010-11 school year, they were not in Needs Improvement status.

After walking through the front doors of Mountaintop into a bright, two story atrium, the library media center is immediately on your right. Entering the media center, a visitor is struck by how bright and airy the two story room feels. A wall full of windows with a curved window seat running around the base flanks one end of the room. Book shelves brimming with new books line the walls and stand free on the library floor. Several rows of computers (approximately 20) sit to the side of the main library floor. Behind the tall circulation desk is a small, glassed in office holding two desks facing each other. This office, originally designed for one, now served as office space for both Pam and her co-LMS, Simone. The full time media clerk assigned to the media center had a desk in a workroom in the back of the library. Modern elementary library media centers in HCSD were built with only one office space because, historically, there had been only one LMS at each. This year, however, the three largest elementary schools in the District had been given a second, full-time librarian. The Department of Media Services did not support this decision and had never seen this model executed in an elementary school. I, as the mentor for new LMSs, wondered how this arrangement would work out; how would tasks and workload be divided? Would the veteran LMS allow Pam to experiment and try new or different ways of doing things? Would Simone be considered the “lead” LMS and Pam be circumvented by the teachers? How would the figured world of Mountain Elementary shape Pam’s LMS identity?

Just like one teacher's classroom may be set up and run differently than her colleague's room next door, library media centers and library media programs reflect the individual histories, beliefs, and expectations of the media specialists who staff them. When Pam was hired, Simone had been the LMS at Mountaintop ES for three of the four years that the school had been open. She, like Pam, had never been a classroom teacher but had worked in the public library system. Simone was most often observed sitting in the office at her desk or engaged in traditional library circulation and story time activities with classes. There did not seem to be a pre-existing culture of LMS-teacher collaboration at Mountaintop nor were teachers particularly engaged in the activities that took place when their classes were in the library. Mountaintop's library media center was on a flexible schedule, meaning that teachers who wished to bring their students to the library would need to sign up for a time slot on the media center's calendar; unfortunately, many classes never visited the library.

And that's another thing about being at such a big school...it's hard. The schedule fills up with checkouts so quickly that we normally – it's hard to schedule all of the people we'd like to see. Even in the computer lab where it's scheduled by the school, it takes...we only see each class maybe twice a semester or something in a rotation.

The figured world of Mountaintop did not include an understanding of the potential impact that the library media program could have on student learning. In an extremely large elementary school struggling with low reading scores on state standardized tests, teachers seemed too harried and busy to take the time to plan with the media specialists. Because Simone had not aggressively pursued collaborative relationships with teachers, their expectations were mostly limited to traditional book check out and story time. When asked whether teachers ever sought the media specialists to instruct students on research skills, Pam stated,

At least here we have a few teachers that we work with to do research projects that go on for a while and they come down several times and they do more in depth things. But that's only a very few teachers out of a ton.

The hard part I think is that they've not really done it before so they don't really expect it and so I actually got kind of frustrated in the middle of this semester about the way I wish I could be doing things but no one else was really being open to or it seemed like I would have to fight really hard or seem like a jerk to change things.

Not only did the teachers seem too busy to visit the library for the purpose of planning instruction, they seemed unaware of the possible role of the LMS in the school's instructional team. When Pam and her co-LMS tried to communicate with teachers about programs or instructional units, they were often ignored.

It's a lot worse than I expected. And there's still now things that teachers are surprised about or ... that may be in every school, but the teachers don't listen to anything. We can tell them 20 times and put it in First Class and say it on the announcements and send emails and put it in boxes and still hear, "Oh, I didn't know you all were doing the CRCT review." We would have loved to do every single class but none of you listened to the messages so we did about half. Well, we did more than half but still, we say something and they say, "Oh, we didn't know about that." But I don't know how else to tell them.

Pam's efforts to coordinate library instruction with what was being taught in the classroom took teachers by surprise. Having never experienced integration of information literacy skills into instruction, Pam's efforts, albeit limited due to lack of teacher involvement in the process, were a new experience for the teachers.

I tried a couple times during the semester to go through and check their little curriculum schedules, or whatever they're called, that tell what they're talking about (in class). I would see things like prediction and beginning, middle, end, and characters, and setting, and stuff like that so I would try to choose books that highlighted those things and then we would talk about it before and after we read the book...I think that the teachers were kind of surprised, actually. They were like, "Hey, that's what we were talking about in class!" And I'm like, "Yeah, I know! How perfect! How did this happen?"

The administrators at Mountaintop also seemed unaware of the potential of having two professional LMSs in their building. At the time of Pam's hiring, the

principal stated that she felt that Pam would make a wonderful addition because of her skill with computers and other technologies. Over the course of the year, the principal assigned to Pam a variety of time-consuming tasks that utilized her technology skills, but did not have a direct impact on students or teachers: the yearbook DVD, student of the month slideshows, webmaster. She and Simone were also assigned to work in the computer lab one full day a week (they rotated their duty every other week so that one LMS was in the lab and the other in the library). This scheduled lab time gave classroom teachers an hour of planning as they were not required to stay with their students. Because of the number of students in the school, each class only visited the LMSs in the computer lab twice each semester making it virtually impossible to do anything meaningful with the students. Observing a group of Kindergarten students in the lab with Pam one day, they were attempting to play a variety of games that had been installed on the computers. Pam spent most of her time hurrying from student to student troubleshooting software glitches, sound problems, and computer issues. Students appeared to have no direction or understanding of the purpose of the activities they were engaged in. The principal's or AP's decision to use the LMS in a fixed rotation (babysitting) shows a lack of understanding of the value of the LMS working as an instructional partner and co-teacher with the classroom teacher.

It's a special. And that's actually one of the reasons why they have us doing it on Tuesdays is so that their teachers have a chance to go to whatever meetings it is that they schedule during specials time. Three out of four days they do have to stay with their class. The teachers hate having computer lab and they usually just let them play games.

Early in the school year, Pam did have one conversation with an assistant principal (AP) that made her feel that the administrator understood, in theory, the impact the library program could have on student achievement.

Actually, one of our APs, the one who is AP of instruction, I really think she would encourage it...I know she's so busy. But the few little conversations I've had with her...she even brought me in for a little short meeting near the beginning of the semester when they were handing out the writing schedule for the whole year because each grade focuses on different types of writing at different times throughout the year. She was interested in having us and stuff we were doing in the library tie into that making sure that I knew what the whole school was working on so I was really happy. I think she is someone who would definitely have the right kind of vision. I think she definitely encourages that and the reading and writing across the curriculum and more of the research kind of skills. She was definitely a good ally. But that was the only meeting I had with her at all at the beginning of the year. And then we haven't really...none of our...we never really had a chance to do anything or get really involved.

The students at Mountaintop Elementary experience the figured world of their school and its library from the position of stereotype: low-income, African-American, low parental involvement, underachieving kids. The school's staff, who are predominantly female and African-American, had a high rate of turnover during Mountaintop's short history. Three principals in 4 years and large numbers of teachers leaving has created a feeling of disconnectedness. In this figured world, students seemed to crave conversation and connection with adults. The experiences these students had with the LMS had been limited primarily to going to the library to check out a book. Since some teachers did not feel it was important to bring their students to the library on a regular basis, many students had never entered the library. A culture of reading did not exist at Mountaintop and only a handful of teachers valued and taught research skills. When they did come to the media center, students often acted helpless and waited for an adult to show them how to do things – find a book, look something up on the Internet – even though they may have been shown or taught on multiple occasions. Students often displayed an “I can't” kind of defeatedness. About helping students find information, Pam stated, “I have run into the hurdle that most students are so deficient in this area and that we see each

student so infrequently, it feels like it is difficult to make a difference.”

The LMS identity that was accepted in the figured world of Mountaintop Elementary was a representation of teachers’ and administrators’ past experiences with LMSs – most particularly, their experiences with Simone. Having come from a public library background, she tended to run the school library media program in a similar fashion with less emphasis on instruction and more on circulation. As Pam stated,

But I think it’s probably just her background because she’s also not from teaching. I don’t know where she went to school but I feel like she is more of the...runs it like a public library. Like it’s just the library for people to come do things – where the books are and everything.

Co-teaching is a relatively new phenomenon in education and is used particularly when students with special needs are included in regular education classes and two teachers – one regular ed and one special ed – teach the class together. School library media specialists have worked in pairs at the middle and high school level for many years with mixed success. Some partnerships are productive and positive while others are tense and fraught with conflict. The LMS who has been at the school the longest obviously has certain advantages and has, for better or worse, created a culture in the LMC that can be difficult to change.

Sometimes when I say, “Oh, it would be really cool if we could maybe do this...” and she’ll just kind of say, “Well, that will never work.” And I want to say, “Can we at least try?” Because I want to tell her sometimes, “Look, you don’t have to worry about it all. I’ll do the hard part and see and then if it doesn’t work it doesn’t work but at least we’ll try something.”

When I asked Pam whether she had developed relationships with any of the teachers, she answered:

I guess I do feel like I have some and more now than I did at the beginning of the year. There were so many things, and it was probably just the fact that everyone else was used to her already and I was new, so she got all the requests and all the questions and everything. That has gotten a lot better

just as people have gotten to know me and realize that we are doing the same job.

As Pam's LMS identity began to form in the figured world of Mountaintop Elementary School, her presence within that figured world brought about change as well. Boaler and Greeno (2000) describe figured worlds as "places where agents come together to construct joint meanings and activities" (as cited in Rubin, 2007). Pam struggled with the restrictive definition of LMS found at Mountaintop and felt conflicted about what she accomplished during her first year. In the next section we will look more closely at Pam's LMS identity construction within the figured world of Mountaintop Elementary School.

### **Pam's LMS Identity**

As a child, Pam had spent many hours in school and public libraries. She enjoyed reading and hung out in the library at the elementary school that she attended and where her mother worked. She had friendly conversations with her elementary LMS about books and reading and thought of libraries and LMSs as places where books could be found. Pam's love of reading and books, a mother who was an elementary teacher and technology specialist, and time spent working in the children's department of a major bookseller led her to eventually believe that being a school library media specialist would be a good career fit. A love of books and reading is the answer most often received when I ask new LMSs why they chose this profession; Pam was no exception.

The master's program that Pam attended provided multiple opportunities to observe in library media centers, meet practicing LMSs, and to read and learn about best practices in library media. Pam's pre-service understanding of the roles of the LMS came, in large part, from the hours spent in classes with Dr. White and other

library media students, some of whom were already working in library media centers. She had already begun to understand the conflict between what the textbooks and journals said and what often happened in the real world of the library media center.

I definitely thought there would be more whole class kind of instruction. But I did know from some of the interviews we had to do during school when we had to go out and talk to people that were working was that it could be frustrating and that you have a hard time getting teachers to collaborate with you so actually I was sort of prepared for some of that.

The 100 hours of internship also informed the ways in which Pam was beginning to think of herself as an LMS. She appreciated the rapport that her supervising LMS had with the students at her school but felt that the organization of the library and the lack of formal planning and instructional focus was unacceptable. With all of these experiences and perceptions in place, Pam entered Mountaintop Elementary with an idea of what it meant to be an LMS: a person who checked out books to students, talked about literature with students, encouraged reading, taught students about finding and using information, was a technology leader, and tried to work with teachers to plan instruction that would lead to content mastery as well as information literacy.

The role of the LMS in the figured world of Mountaintop Elementary had been established by Simone before Pam's arrival. The traditional functions of reading stories aloud, checking out books to students, and keeping the library neat and tidy, along with other assigned tasks, could, in fact, take an enormous amount of time in such a large school. The addition of a second LMS to this world offered opportunities for the principal, Simone, and the teachers to imagine other identities for the LMS. However, the only member of that figured world that seized that opportunity was the principal. She quickly began to assign to Pam many tasks that

were not necessarily related to the library media center: making slide shows, the yearbook DVD, web page maintenance. Additionally, both LMSs did before and after school duty, lunch duty, and worked in the computer lab one day a week. The principal obviously saw another full time staff person as a valuable asset who could perform many tasks not necessarily related to the mission of the media center. In the beginning, the number of “other duties” assigned to Pam did not seem like a problem.

I hate to admit it, but quite a lot of what I do is not specifically supporting the library curriculum. I don't feel too bad about this because many of the side things I am asked to do seem like they are important to the school as a whole, such as the website.

However, as the year wore on, she expressed her surprise and frustration at how full her days were without doing much actual collaboration with classroom teachers:

With all the stuff now, I'm the spelling bee, I run the spelling bee now, and the website and everything and all that kind of stuff does take up so much time that I guess I feel like if I was doing more actual lesson things that I'd like to be doing that I'd never go home.

Like doing the yearbook thing. There's no reason that should be me. And the fact that Ms. J has also done this yearbook DVD. I was the one who couldn't say no. But it has nothing to do with the library whatsoever.

But really, all the photography and the slide shows and the student of the month slide shows and...maybe it's partly that our school is so big that there are so many things going on that every month there's a ton of different things that need to be photographed. And I'm enough of a perfectionist that they need to be at least somewhat edited and cropped so they don't look awful.

At the beginning of the school year, Pam's status as novice positioned her in such a way that her identity was more prescribed than constructed. Typically overwhelmed, new LMSs often feel like they can barely keep up with the daily tasks of circulation and shelving much less initiate higher level, collaboratively planned instruction. When asked to comment on a quote from an article that stated, “Remember that the library is your classroom. You are the teacher and it is your job

to teach your curriculum whenever you have students. Every single thing you do should contribute to that goal” (Coatney, 2007, p. 60), Pam answered that, although this might be an ideal goal, “...it is unrealistic in the day-to-day demands of the job.”

Pam’s work identity at the halfway point in the school year was centered on her ability to accomplish tasks for the school that no one else was willing or able to do. In the media center, Pam found herself spending a lot of time helping students on computers. Teachers tended to send students in small groups to do research in the library. Because of the size of the school, this often meant that there were multiple groups of students from different classes working independently – but only marginally independently. Because students had received little instruction in many of the skills needed to carry out research using Internet resources, a lot of individualized instruction happened at the point of need. Pam felt that this was an extremely important function that she performed.

They come down to do research or the teacher wants us to help them with a certain thing in small groups of research...I find that they are very behind on that kind of stuff. They have no clue how to search for things or what to do with the information once they find it other than just print it out or copy it and paste it from there. So there’s a lot of that. That’s pretty time-consuming.

Although helping individual or small groups with research skills was something that Pam had fully expected to be doing, she recognized how difficult it would be to meet the needs of such a large student population using such a hit or miss model of instruction. She lamented the fact that there was not more whole group instruction and that teachers only seemed to bring their classes to the media center as a group to check out books. She also realized that the lack of clear definition of the LMS’s job roles was a challenge to understanding herself as an LMS. She said, “I agree that it’s a bit of a problem that our jobs are not as specifically defined as that of classroom teachers.”

I think that's actually what would help the most to me feeling more like I was really doing something and doing what my job was supposed to be is if they were more aware.

She also struggled with the particulars of what she should be doing in the library.

The lack of a standardized curriculum coupled with the diverse expectations of the school community caused Pam to feel that having a "library curriculum" would be helpful.

I agree that our curriculum should be, or at least be centered around, information literacy, but this is also somewhat difficult to define and teach. Something I have learned this year is how difficult it is to begin to teach this.

With her growing sense of frustration over what she perceived as lack of teacher awareness of how the library media program could help their students (as well as the level of student need) came the dawning realization of what it was going to take for Pam to feel that she was really "doing the job." Pam began to talk about making changes to the existing program in an effort to adequately and equitably serve the school's population. Making these changes, however, was challenging due to the existing culture, Pam's reluctance to rock the boat, and Simone's status as "senior" LMS.

I guess partly I don't want to seem like I'm too pushy. But by the end of the semester I was frustrated for several weeks - kind of in the middle - trying to figure out how I start changing things. I was just kind of frustrated for a little while. But then finally I just decided...well, I just need to start doing it and see how it works. I don't want to make a weird situation working with my partner. And also, I don't really know even if we did start doing these cool collaborative lessons or something, I don't really know that she would help that much. It's not really the way that she works. It's not the way she makes plans.

At the mid-point in the school year, Pam was realizing that her co-LMS was really not interested in making any major changes to how things were happening in the media center. Pam felt that, as the new addition to the staff, she did not have sufficient authority to attempt to implement changes but found herself frustrated by

what she felt like was an ineffective program. The LMS identity that she was formulating was opposed to that of Simone's, who she felt behaved more like a public librarian, focusing on people using the LMC space and resources but not so much on providing instruction or collaborating with teachers. Pam, in the meantime, had continued to read professional journals, blogs, and followed various library media listservs in order to develop ideas and collect tips and strategies from other practicing LMSs. This type of professional development was integral to Pam's identity as an LMS. She said, "I think a good LMS needs to also be communicating with his or her peers to see what they're doing. I read every single thing in the LMS conference and I really like knowing what everybody else is doing." Attempting to make this instruction-oriented LMS identity a reality, Pam assumed the full responsibility for creating the type of media program she idealized. She began planning the ways that she would do things differently in the future – either at that school the following year or at another location if she ended up being transferred.

I feel like a lot of it, which can be kind of daunting but also exciting, is that I feel like a lot of it is up to me. So even the stuff that is frustrating I kind of feel like I just need to go on and figure it out and try things. I'm kind of realizing the more I get into it that you can be all sorts of things and maybe it will be different than I thought but it will always be interesting. There will always be things that I can do and try and learn new things and work on so I definitely still really really love it. I like the pace of it - that it's always busy and will never get bored.

It was obvious that the LMS identity that had been available to Pam was at odds with the one that she continued to intellectually value and wish to embody. She felt that the only way she was able to devote so much time to "other" duties, such as web page maintenance and school photography, was the simple fact that there were two full time media specialists and a media clerk staffing the library. The media clerk did almost all of the shelving, freeing up the LMSs to work with students and

teachers. However, Mountaintop was almost unique in its staffing arrangement, being only one of three elementary schools in the District with two full time LMSs and a clerk. Pam knew that it was likely that this level of staffing would not continue beyond the 2011-2012 school year, due to budget shortfalls, and that there was a good chance that she would find herself working in a library alone the following year. This idea began to actually appeal to Pam, as she realized the amount of freedom to experiment would offer her.

I do feel like having a partner has been weird for me. I don't think I work very well like that. Actually, we get along really well; I really like her a lot like she's someone I would be friends with. But I can either follow directions or give directions. But it's been really strange. Taking the initiative to plan things feels weird sometimes. I'm very interested to see...I didn't necessarily want to move or want to stay or anything, I would just really like to see what it would be like to be by myself. I know it would be harder and a lot busier but I think there will be some things that I will feel more confident planning or doing or something like that when it's just me cuz even when I was little, playing violin or something, I never wanted anyone to hear me practice. I will show you when I'm done. It's hard for me to be working on things with someone. I would rather just work on it on my own, even if I have to work on it all night. And then you can see it when I'm done.

Pam admitted that she probably was not as assertive as she could have been in her efforts to pull in teachers to more collaborative planning and teaching. She repeatedly commented that she needed to be more "proactive" and looked to her second year of practice, with its diminished newness and heightened familiarity, as offering her more freedom to try new things. She continued to blame herself for not having had enough knowledge or practice to have things in place during this school year and seemed enthused about the possibilities for the next.

Hopefully next year when I can start the year with more plans or something, not even necessarily concrete plans but because every time during the year, I've started a ton of things but I haven't ever had time to finish them or by the time I do have time to finish them that ... whatever .. that time that it was useful is gone. That's the main thing I need to work on.

Despite Pam's frustration with some aspects of the figured world in which she spent her novice year as an LMS, she ended the school year feeling that some of her greatest accomplishments had to do with the relationships she had forged with students. Despite the fact that she may have felt that the students were not receiving enough direct instruction, did not get to spend enough time in the media center, or had few opportunities to develop 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills, she consistently reflected on how positively the students responded to her, to the library, to books she introduced them to, and to the experience of having focused attention bestowed upon them. This identity, the LMS who welcomes students, listens to their opinions, shares her own reading experiences, and is generally a non-judgmental adult in a stressful school environment, echoes the experiences Pam had with her own elementary school librarians. Those women who welcomed her and let her "hang out" in the media center, made her feel "smart" and like she belonged, had a huge impact on how she enacted school librarianship.

When reflecting on the almost completed year, Pam stated,

I think one of the things – particularly in this school – I most accomplished was getting to know the kids and being someone who actually listens to them and thinks their ideas are cool. But, that's just because I think a lot of these kids don't get that at home. Not necessarily because it's the librarian's job. It just happens to be something that I really enjoy and it also helps get them interested in books, too, which is good. We can be friends and talk about books and I actually do want to know what they thought about the book.

Although some of the students at Mountaintop had some challenging behaviors, Pam's confidence in her ability to manage the students grew as the year went on. Pam felt that the Discourse of Mountaintop's figured world did not include exchanges with students that made them feel valued and respected; she, however, found herself making more of an effort to connect with the students than most of the other staff. Her sense of herself as a school employee and LMS included her

satisfaction with the results of her efforts to help students make positive choices and control their behavior.

Some of those kids, if they're in there doing something they're not supposed to do, if you yell at them they're just going to do it worse or yell back at you or something. But if you just kind of direct them toward something different you can usually get them off topic and then now they're kids who will pretty much listen to me. Or, this one kid who is always here when he's not supposed to be, well, we talked about books a couple of times and Hugo Cabret was the one he got really excited about and we talked about it and he read the book and watched the movie. Conversations like that kind of led to him being more receptive when I need to ask him to leave or something. If you treat him like a person then he doesn't feel like you're yelling at him.

As the school year drew to a close, Pam began to speak more frequently about changes she hoped to make the following year and areas that she hoped to focus on with students. She took quite seriously her responsibility help students feel and recognize the power inherent in being able to find information independently. She knew that that was an "important" job and that the students at Mountaintop would benefit greatly from more guidance in information seeking and evaluation. She hoped to design some lessons so that we would be ready to hit the ground running the following year and also felt that she was responsible for communicating to teachers the importance of using the resources available in the media center and of bringing their students in for more than book checkout.

But I guess in general, helping - maybe they're related at least - helping the kids know how to...not only know how to find information but realize that they can. That they have the ability. That's been one of the most frustrating things. The only time I ever get annoyed with the kids is when they don't even try! Did you look in Destiny? No. I showed you how to do this at the beginning of the year - I know you can. They can, if I go over there and walk them through it by just ... not really telling them anything. Just asking them questions leads them to it.

The figured world of Mountain Elementary challenged Pam pre-conceived understandings of what it meant to be an LMS. At the end of her first year, she had moved through phases of acceptance of the identity offered, frustration with that

identity, leading finally to a desire for change. Whether the agency that could lead to re-envisioning herself and the library media program at Mountaintop would be available to Pam in the 2012-13 school year remained to be seen.

### **Summary**

Pam, like other new media specialists, was led to the school library field through her love of books and reading. The early influence of her mother's work in education, both as a teacher and a technology specialist, and the time Pam spent around K12 schools also guided her toward a career in the educational system.

When Pam joined the staff at Mountaintop Elementary School, there was already an LMS and a full time media clerk on staff with whom the teachers and students were familiar. Having come from the public library system, Simone's approach to school librarianship differed sharply from that which Pam had been introduced during her master's program. The figured world at Mountaintop did not view the library media center and its staff as a fully integrated part of the instructional program; the LMC was a place where students and teachers might work on projects and the staff performed functions such as checking out materials and helping people use the computers and other resources in the room. Although Pam felt frustrated at not being able to enact many of the roles she had believed she would assume when she became an LMS, she did not give up on her goal of building a library media program that would have instruction at its core. The identity she was constructing at Mountaintop was consistent with that goal and her focused planning for what she thought the next year would bring was demonstration of the agency that wished to exercise. At the end of the school year, it was unclear where Pam would be assigned to work but it seemed extremely likely that she would not return to Mountaintop. Although she had spoken about the potential benefits of

spending another year in the same location – because of the time that had already been invested in building relationships with both teachers and students – Pam seemed almost excited about the prospect of being a solo LMS and the freedom from the perceived constraints that she felt at Mountaintop. The image Pam held of herself as an adult who listened to and valued students was an outgrowth of the figured world in which she spent her first year as an LMS; however, the school library specific characteristics and roles that she had anticipated experiencing were not easily acquired. Being able to observe Pam in her second year of practice would have been very interesting. The epilogue, below, describes the circumstances under which Pam ended her year at HCSD.

### **Epilogue**

Pam was among the group of six LMSs who were informed that their contracts had been “delayed” due to overstaffing in the position. Contracts were required to be signed and returned within approximately 10 days; the department of human resources was waiting for all contracts to be returned to determine whether enough LMSs had retired or resigned to keep the six on staff. During that waiting period, Pam withdrew from conversation with me. She seemed to understand that it was likely that she would not be employed by the District for the following school year, but she asked few questions and did not seem particularly stressed whereas the other new LMSs in her cohort were in varying states of panic. Approximately two weeks later, after all contracts had been signed and returned to HR, all six of the LMSs whose contracts had been delayed received one. Pam, however, felt certain that she would not be back at Mountaintop, considering that the delay had been prompted by an overage of LMSs on the payroll. Several weeks later, Pam was called by a representative of the HR department who informed her that she was being

assigned to another large elementary school in the district. Pam called the principal at the new school and made plans to go in over the summer and begin to familiarize herself with her new media center. She seemed optimistic about the prospect of being on her own in an elementary school library.

Unfortunately, Pam never got to work in that library. In late June, as the District's board of education attempted to hammer out a workable budget for the upcoming fiscal year, a proposal to cut 25 library media specialists from the District was offered by the superintendent to the Board. Eventually, a total of 13 LMSs were laid off – one of whom was Pam. She interviewed for an opening in the district in which her mother worked and where she had attended school as a child and was offered a job as LMS at a medium-sized elementary school where she has a clerk and a technology integration specialist working alongside her.

## CHAPTER SIX

## MAYA

*“The only thing I am apprehensive about is the lessons. Teaching the lessons and making sure the kids understand.”* **Maya**

**Personal Biography and History**

Maya, a 36 year old African American female, married with one child, had been trying to get a job in the HCSD for almost two years when several positions came open in the summer of 2011. She had been laid off from her previous position as a media clerk in another metro school district two years prior and had completed her master’s degree, begun 5 years before, during that time. When she visited the Department of Media Services to meet our staff, we were struck by her quiet yet confident demeanor. She downplayed her period of unemployment, talked about the positive things she had accomplished during that time, and exuded enthusiasm about the possibility of working as an LMS in HCSD. Her desire to join the District arose from the fact that she had friends working in the system who had espoused its reputation for supporting their library media programs. Maya’s close friend and mentor, Diana, who now worked as an LMS in a HCSD high school, had encouraged Maya to pursue her LMS certification and to apply for a job when she was finished.

As a child, Maya had attended both private and public schools in the southeastern United States. She admitted to having “no recollection” of a library in her private elementary school, although she remembered being assigned summer reading and visiting the public library to borrow the assigned books. Her first memory of a school library came from middle school where she was a patrol in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and assigned to work in the media center. Despite reporting to her post there throughout that year, she could not recall the LMS that worked there and

believed that she did not have much interaction with her. High school proved to be another blank spot when it came to libraries and librarians; Maya seemed to rely on the public library for her reading and information needs. In fact, she remembers visiting the public library almost every week throughout her childhood and reading being a favorite pastime. She attributes her need for glasses in the fifth grade to reading in dark places too often and remembers that she performed well above grade level on reading tests in elementary school. Maya's connection with books and reading was a dominant theme whenever we discussed her work as an LMS.

Immediately after high school, Maya enrolled in a small, coastal college where she began studying history with the goal of becoming a history teacher. She considered studying library science, but was told by many that it would be "too hard." Halfway through her undergraduate studies the college lost its education program to another nearby school, and Maya was limited to receiving a bachelor's degree in history without teaching credentials. She looked for work that would utilize her history knowledge with the park and ranger service, but jobs were scarce. Eventually, she accepted a position teaching Kindergarten in a private school where teaching certification was not required; Maya described working with these "unruly" young children as "hectic" and left after one year. After a period working as a substitute teacher, Maya was hired as a fourth grade teacher at a charter school; she began the job in October and finished out the school year. Maya said that she enjoyed teaching fourth graders, although she did not feel comfortable teaching all subject areas. At the end of that year, the charter school closed. Later, while working as a media clerk, Maya came to the realization that she needed to make a decision about a career path. She had observed that history, her subject of choice, was often taught by male coaches at the high school level, her preferred age group. Two of

Maya's aunts were teachers and her mother had worked as a paraprofessional after retiring from the state and they encouraged her to find work outside the traditional classroom. While she was pondering what courses and certification exams to take, her friend Diana, who was working on library media certification, encouraged Maya to join her at Eastern College and University. Applying to graduate school and taking and passing the GRE were hurdles to overcome, but in 2005 Maya was enrolled in the hybrid (face-to-face and online) Master of Education in Library Media and Instructional Technology program at Eastern College.

### **Pre-Service Experiences and Perceptions**

When Maya entered the library media program at Eastern College, her understanding of the role of the school LMS was based primarily on what she had experienced in the schools in which she had worked, information shared by her mentor, Diana, and the observations she had made at the schools in which her aunts had taught. She reminisced,

I would go to their schools and see the library but it was never really a busy place. It was always older ladies, always standing behind the counter, so you're thinking, it's not a whole lot, you're in a school, you get the benefits of vacations. That's not the only reason but you're thinking you interact with students but you don't have them all day long, it's not a lot of accountability in terms of testing and discipline problems. So I thought, hmm, this would be easier than going back for just (teaching) certification. Trying to get a certification in a content area and teaching certification would have taken a lot longer.

The private school where Maya worked as a Kindergarten teacher for a year had a small media center that was staffed by an uncertified LMS who was in the process of getting certified. This woman would sometimes ask Maya to fill in for her when she needed help, giving Maya the opportunity to experience the activities that took place in the small space - primarily book checkout. Because the circulation system had not been automated, checkouts were performed manually and recorded

on an Excel spreadsheet. Later, at the middle school where Maya worked as a paraprofessional, she was surprised and impressed by the fact that the LMS who worked there conducted story times with 6<sup>th</sup> graders and did orientation “with every single student.” Her ability to get students excited about reading was inspiring to Maya. This media specialist’s focus on reading appealed to Maya’s own beliefs about the relationship between the LMS, books, reading, and student achievement. Maya was disappointed that this LMS resigned after only two years and before Maya was ready to do her internship. She implied to Maya that her resignation was related to a lack of support from the principal, telling her that she would “understand someday.” Maya interpreted this comment as an insinuation of the ubiquity of inadequate administrator support. The LMS who was hired next, a woman named Jean, supervised Maya during her internship and was, in Maya’s estimation, an ineffective LMS. Maya observed that there was scant foot traffic in the library and very little instruction took place. Although being the primary provider of technical support was a key part of the LMS job description in this school district, Jean was not tech savvy and enlisted Maya’s help when she went on her technology troubleshooting rounds. Jean was Maya’s primary supervisor during her internship; however, Maya spent a portion of her field practice working with her mentor, Diana, at a high school in the HCSD. Maya stated that this was where she got the practical experience she needed and was able to check off the items on her required task list from the university.

That’s mostly when I would get my checklist done. She would show me stuff that you do on a computer in Destiny in 30 seconds. Like, this is how you add a copy. I wouldn’t necessarily have to do it - I just needed to see it. Of course, she recruited me for the Reading Bowl a couple of times. I know one time they had a book fair, even though I know they’re not supposed to, and actually I was the person collecting the money. I witnessed her ordering books, shelving, hosting college fairs, making sure kids knew how to locate

websites that were authentic, how to go on and find schools and their admissions process. So, I witnessed them doing several activities and then watching how they monitored computer usage and students coming in and out the library during lunch, things of that nature.

Maya's decision to enter the LMS field was clearly influenced by the thought that the job was less demanding than that of a classroom teacher. "You're thinking, they check books in and they check books out. Nobody knows that there's a lot of technicalities to cataloging and all of that stuff."

When Maya began her master's program at Eastern, she found the classes difficult and confusing and sometimes felt like she was in "over her head." She found the adjustment to online learning challenging.

I didn't know what was going on. I was so confused. Before I started, because you only went to three classes during the semester and the rest of it was online, I pulled out my syllabus and was like, what is this? I was used to going to class and actually getting a syllabus. I went to college in '94. To pull it off line...I didn't even understand the objectives! So it was real puzzling, like, what have I gotten myself into?

The classes that seemed especially difficult were Technical Services, where students were required to take a computer apart and put it back together again, and Cataloging. Maya stated that she would often reteach herself everything that had been covered in class so that she wouldn't forget it. Although these classes were difficult, Maya felt that the program gave her an excellent foundation for becoming an LMS. She also believed that the professors went "above and beyond" in giving students challenging and meaningful assignments that would prepare them for the real world of library media practice. Maya was impressed by the fact that many of the courses were the same as those that her friends enrolled in ALA accredited programs were taking and that public librarians acted as guest lecturers, giving students a broad perspective on libraries and library services. At one point, Maya considered pursuing an ALA accredited degree online, but with only one ALA

accredited program in the state she worried that admittance and transferring credits might be more trouble than it was worth. An indication of Maya's feelings about the lower status of a non-ALA accredited program was reflected in her comment: "So I kinda felt like I was really prepared and like I should have earned a little more than just the media specialist degree, but I know there's a lot of stuff that we didn't get into, so..."

Having had classroom teaching experience, Maya felt, should not be a prerequisite to being an LMS. Reflecting on the fact that her supervising LMS, Jean, had come from the classroom while her mentor, Diana, had not, Maya seemed to feel that a teacher might carry into the LMS position some of the misconceptions about the role of the LMS that undermine best practices in the library media center.

I don't think that it should be necessary because I think as a teacher you develop your own views of what the library is. And I think someone new to the media program comes in and finds out a whole 'nother side of what the library is, its function. Teachers will come and ask you to introduce lessons as opposed to providing support. Teach syllables or whatever or they just need a break and they want to dump a class off in there. If you're a librarian who's been a teacher before you may be not so inviting to the people coming into the library - they think the teacher just wants a break. I mean, it all inadvertently affects the students. I guess somebody green like me would be like, oh, come on in. We could read a story and checkout. I do know some media specialists who were classroom teachers and it happened to work out well. But I just don't think that it should be necessary.

The one advantage that Maya felt her limited classroom experience would give her was the classroom management skills that she had developed that a non-teaching LMS would have to learn on the job. However, she anticipated that classroom management would not really be an issue for most LMSs; Maya believed that students were generally so excited by the novelty of being in the media center and happy to be checking out books that behavior issues would be minimal.

Maya had made clear her preference to work in a high school media center when she had made her pre-employment visit to the Department of Media Services. Her inclination to work with older students was a result of her preference for the reading material that would be found in a high school library. Maya did not enjoy reading graphic novels or books in a series and believed that elementary and middle school students were much more inclined toward those types of books. She looked forward to conversations with students about the books they were reading and felt that she would be more effective in promoting literacy among students with whom she could enthusiastically share her own reading preferences.

I really wanted high school because I thought the collection might be something that I would sit down and read. I felt like I could relate to books that high school students might want to read more than the graphic novels, getting into a graphic novel or a series of books with kids. I have a different perception now, but I felt like at high school I could exercise my talents more with encouraging kids to read.

She anticipated that the activities that she would be engaged in as an elementary media specialist were teaching students how to locate books; the differences between different types of books (easy, fiction, biography, non-fiction, etc.); motivating students to read and to experiment with reading in different genres of literature; modeling for teachers how to encourage reading; and matching books to students. I was shocked when Maya admitted that one of the biggest surprises of the reality of her LMS job was that she reads aloud to students every day. The LMS at the elementary school where she had worked apparently did not do story time or read-alouds, and Maya's pre-service program had not given her extensive elementary school experience.

The difference with the elementary school that I worked at, we never read to the kids. I think I might have seen her read one book to the kids and I guess I didn't expect to be reading to them.

Maya obviously felt that the roles of reader advisor and collection development and circulation were important functions of the LMS. Additionally, her master's program had stressed the collaborative role that the LMS should play and she anticipated attending planning meetings and working closely with teachers on lessons that would support classroom instruction. Maya's statements regarding other librarian's skill at creating a culture of reading in their schools illustrated her personal philosophy regarding the role that the LMS plays in a school's literacy program and the importance of encouraging students to read.

### **Winfrey Theme Elementary School's Figured World - Context, Discourse, Culture**

Winfrey Theme Elementary School is a dark, sprawling, brick box of a building constructed in the late 1990s. Four long wings extend off of a central hallway that houses the offices, cafeteria, gymnasium, and library media center. The large building accommodates an equally large population; in the fall of 2011, when Maya began working there, over 900 students were enrolled in grades PreK-5.

Winfrey is one of several "traditional theme" schools in HCSD, The traditional theme school provides families a "school choice" beyond their local neighborhood school; students are chosen through an automated lottery system. Some of the supposed differences between a theme school and a neighborhood school are strictly enforced student behavior policies, a focus on core academic subjects, parental involvement requirements, and mandated student uniforms. The difference in the atmosphere at Winfrey is noticeable as soon as you enter the building: students dressed khaki slacks and polo shirts stand quietly in line. Teachers and students alike look serious and no-nonsense. Classroom doors are closed with few individual students walking in the hallways. During the school day the focus is on core academic subjects (English/language arts, reading, math, science, social studies)

as well as a world language and required physical education. Special activities such as book clubs, talent shows, music, drama, or dance performances, Black History Festival and Spanish Festival all take place after school and are planned by the Reading Specialist. Instructional time is vigorously protected and there is little time for activities that are not believed to be tied directly to student learning in core areas.

In school year 2011-12, Winfrey was one of the three elementary schools that earned a second full-time LMS to work alongside the already existing team of an LMS and a full time media clerk. Brandy Warren, the LMS, was an African American woman in her 30s, and was one of the new LMSs I had worked with four years before. Like Maya, she worked as a media clerk prior to receiving her media specialist certification and we each other well. When Brandy's principal had informed her that their school had earned a second LMS and that he was going to be hiring someone, she called me to talk about this new development. From the beginning, Brandy felt that this staffing could be problematic and believed that it would probably only last for a year. She was worried about the division of labor and possible disruption to the program she had begun to put into place. However, she committed herself to making the best of what she thought could be a difficult situation and seemed to cast herself in the role of trainer and senior partner. Brandy indicated that she planned to try to help the person who got this job learn to run a library independently because she strongly believed that the District would not continue this double staffing beyond one year. Because of Brandy's attitude, Maya's time at Winfrey often resembled an internship. Brandy quickly took control of their schedule and laid out a division of duties and responsibilities for all three of the library staff members. Brandy assigned Maya grades Kindergarten through second

while Brandy worked with third through fifth graders and both shared PreK. Throughout the school year, Brandy “allowed” Maya to participate in most of the activities related to the administration of the media center and the other roles of the LMS. Maya did not seem to question Brandy’s decisions, directions, or authority in interpreting and defining the purpose and goals of the library media program at Winfrey or the ways that those goals would be attained. She was deferential and respectful and often addressed Brandy using the formal “Miss Warren” in both face-to-face communications in the library as well as in our interviews and discussions. Brandy, who had come to Winfrey two years before in an unusual personnel swap, was secure in the knowledge that her principal, Dr. Murphy, had specifically chosen her and had conducted some tricky negotiations to trade his previous LMS for her. He made his pleasure at the difference he saw between Brandy’s performance and the previous LMS clearly known and stated to staff in Media Services that he did not want the addition of a second LMS to disrupt the improved atmosphere of his library media center.

Principal Murphy had placed the library media center on a fixed schedule sometime after Brandy’s arrival at Winfrey; classes came to the library once every other week to check out books. Maya was led to believe that in previous years teachers had not regularly brought their classes to the media center and the principal, by adopting this schedule, essentially mandated regular visits to the library. Maya stated that she felt like the schedule “worked” and that she did not question the schedule because “... they put something in place that works for their school because the whole thing about scheduling classes kind of scared me.” The fixed schedule meant that Maya and Brandy saw “kids from the time we walk in in the morning.” The principal communicated to both Brandy and Maya that he wanted

the library to be the “hub of learning.” I have observed that, among administrators, this phrase often seems to be synonymous with a busy library no matter what activities are taking place. Principals like to see lots of students checking out books, taking Accelerated Reader quizzes, speech and occupational therapists using the space for therapy, teachers and parents using computers. Dr. Murphy seemed to equate this general “busy-ness” with an “effective” library program. Volunteers that presented themselves to the front office were instructed by Dr. Murphy and his staff to go to the media center to be put to work. Early in the year, Maya measured Dr. Murphy’s support of the media center this way: “When we have visitors in the building he brings them by the library. I like the fact that he wants kids in here. That was part of the scheduling because the teachers just wouldn’t come.” Maya believed that the principal’s expectations would be met if the media center appeared to be busy on a daily basis.

The enforcement of a fixed schedule on a media program often results in the lowering of teacher expectations regarding the types of activities or instruction that will occur there. Teachers think of going to the library as another “special” class, like art or music, and expect the “teacher” (the LMS in this case) to independently plan and deliver the instruction or design the activities that occur during that scheduled time. At Winfrey, teachers did little or no pre-planning with the media specialists and did not communicate regarding what was being taught in the classroom. This lack of collaboration resulted in “lessons” being delivered in isolation from the core curriculum. Maya reported that teachers frequently visited the library to gather information and resources for their own or their families’ personal needs; unfortunately, they did not often do the same for their classes or students.

Because I had worked with Brandy at her first school library placement, where the expectations of the principal had been difficult for her to meet, I knew the origin of her focus on “lessons.” The demands of her previous principal had led Brandy to believe that she needed to be able to teach “library skills” lessons to students every week when they visited the library. She had been designing “lessons,” such as dictionary skills and fiction versus non-fiction that she often taught in isolation from other classroom activities. Teachers had begun to believe that a “lesson” should be available any time they wanted to drop their class off in the LMC. When classes came to the library, teachers were passive non-participants, expecting the LMSs to be in charge and in control of their class while they were in the media center. They sometimes announced their desired lesson as they entered the library or asked the LMSs if they would introduce a concept, such as syllables, with no warning or time for preparation. The types of lessons requested by teachers included author’s purpose, fact and fiction, and beginning, middle and end. The training Brandy provided Maya in “lesson” writing included stipulations regarding the necessity of: 1) an introduction, 2) an activity, and 3) an assessment or follow-up. The lower grade students that Maya was responsible for seeing most frequently experienced story time and book check out when they visited the media center and teachers checked out books to take to their classrooms for students to use with the Accelerated Reader program. The expectation for the creation and delivery of lessons by Maya for the younger students seemed to come primarily from Brandy who advised Maya that she needed to have a collection of lessons. While Maya worked to create these lessons, Brandy acted as reviewer, editor, critic, coach, model, and evaluator.

The Accelerated Reader (AR) program, a reading incentive program, was in use at Winfrey and seemed to have a strong influence on both the principal's and teachers' expectations of the purpose of the library media center. Some teachers were adamant about students only checking out fiction ("chapter books") rather than non-fiction books about topics that interested them, such as motorcycles or drawing because the AR quizzes on the non-fiction books were often more difficult or non-existent. Teachers believed that students needed to only read fiction on or near their grade level to practice reading skills and discouraged the LMSs from introducing students to other types of reading materials. As a result, some students seemed unenthusiastic about reading or going to the library to check out books. Maya said, "I feel like some of the kids get their attitudes about reading from the teachers, like it's not important."

Another disappointment to Maya was the fact that the library did not sponsor reading related programs such as Dr. Seuss's Birthday celebrations, book character dress up days, or reading club lunches or meetings. All of these activities were planned by another staff member and many took place after school hours; the school day was reserved for core academic subjects and assemblies, parties, and celebrations were kept to a minimum. Maya had LMS friends who talked about what fun they had putting on such programs and how much the students looked forward to them. Maya felt that that holding such reading-inspired, fun events in the library would make it seem like a warmer, friendlier place.

The figured world of Winfrey Theme Elementary School was one in which teachers and other staff enacted a strict interpretation of what a "traditional" education should look like. Opening the door into any classroom, including the media center, a visitor could have expected to see quiet students wearing uniforms

studying core academic subjects. Use of the library media center and its staff by teachers was driven, in large part, by the principal's association of busy-ness with effectiveness. A fixed schedule ensured that there would be a steady flow of students through the media center. Brandy's focus on providing "lessons," prompted by her experience at her previous school, was also an attempt to carve a niche for the library media program into the traditional academic focus of the school. She hoped that providing information literacy instruction would legitimize the role of the LMS and the media center in an atmosphere that seemed to value assuring that students had mastered the skills being tested on standardized tests. This figured world provided Maya with the landscape for her LMS identity development, as described in the next section.

### **Maya's LMS Identity**

When Maya arrived at Winfrey Theme Elementary, she felt some trepidation about her new position. A high school library was her first choice of placement and, instead, she found herself at a large elementary school. The fact that she would be partnered with a more experienced LMS offered Maya some comfort and she gratefully allowed Brandy to take the lead in all facets of the LMC's operation. With Brandy enacting the role of the mentor/senior partner, Maya seemed to feel as if she had to model herself after Brandy's example of school librarianship.

There were some practices in place that Maya questioned, but the fixed schedule was not one of them. She indicated that being on a fixed schedule was reassuring because of its predictable nature and the fact that this was not the time during which they were teaching "lessons." It appeared that the scheduled library visits most often included story time and book check out. When asked how she felt about the schedule, Maya explained:

I feel like it works. I feel like they put something in place that works for their school because the whole thing about scheduling classes kind of scared me. But because it's not lessons I'm okay with that. Because I do understand that we have a large number of kids in this school and sometimes when people miss their scheduled time and teachers just send them three at a time it's overwhelming in here. Even though it's three of us, it's like there's a class, this one needs a lesson, somebody might have said, well, my kids need to check out, we'll be really quick ... and it doesn't go quickly.

Maya's descriptions of the procedures they followed for book checkout were painstakingly detailed and provided a glimpse of her desire for order in the library. Story times were carefully orchestrated, sedate occurrences where students were expected to remain mostly quiet. Once they were allowed to get up to check out books, some age groups were limited to one book cart full of materials that were deemed by the LMSs as being appropriate for their grade level. Story times were often built around holidays or other seasonal themes.

And so we'll read them a story and then PreK does not check out at all. So I'll read them maybe two stories, ask them questions about the stories. For Kindergarten I'll just read something short, maybe ask a couple of questions, well, I'll do a little introductory to whatever the book is, ask them how many of them are familiar with the topic and give me some ideas if anyone wants to share when they might have had that experience or something like that, then we read the story, maybe ask about two questions, and then I line them up. Normally we line them up by, "If you have on a yellow shirt, or if you have on a blue jacket" and we'll line 'em up. We may send them to the tables depending on how much time we have. If we're pushed for time we'll just leave them on the carpet and call them two at a time and they'll check out on our cart (choose books from this cart) with a shelf marker. They take their book to the circulation desk and bring their shelf marker back and hand it to a friend. We get through checkout fairly easy and quickly and each class gets thirty minutes for checkout.

Brandy determined the ways in which the library schedule's time would be allocated. Once again, Maya did not question these decisions but matter-of-factly described Brandy's control over the way the library's time and resources were allocated.

But we normally, because Ms. Warren leaves the afternoons open, very rarely do we have an afternoon class. I think we have maybe two or three classes

that may come in at 1:30 and that may be two times a week. And that's just 5<sup>th</sup> grade because we do it during the special rotation time. But very rarely do we have an afternoon class. She likes to leave the afternoon open for lessons.

Maya's understanding of the roles of the LMS were heavily influenced by Brandy's beliefs and practices. When she talked about designing and teaching lessons in the LMC, it seemed that Maya was repeating a lecture that Brandy had delivered about what was to be taught in the media center and how.

Brandy says that she has general lessons that she did when she was at her old school - those she brought over. But she told me just to have...that I may want to develop like a dictionary skills lesson for younger grades. She was telling me the difference in how it's not detailed at all. We're talking about the front, middle, and back of the dictionary, what letters may be found in the front, middle, back. We're talking about the purpose of the guide words but we're not expecting them to really fully understand, we're just letting them know that they're there and you use them as a guide. She was telling me the difference between the rigor of the younger grade lessons and how detailed it would get if I was doing a second grade lesson on dictionary skills and how to incorporate their spelling words and using the white board.

Creating and teaching lessons to students seemed to be the most stressful part of becoming a media specialist for Maya. Although she had spent some time as a classroom teacher, she was very anxious about her ability to design engaging, meaningful lessons for the young students she worked with. Although she had been required to design a collaborative unit during her preparation program, Maya felt that planning instruction for real students was much more difficult. Trying to get input from teachers who really didn't have an expectation for what instruction in the LMC should look like as well as her own lack of exposure to collaborative practices left Brandy to be the primary model for what she would do as an LMS. When asked what she found different between what she learned in her master's program and her practice at Winfrey, she answered,

The lessons I think were easier ... it was easy to create lessons then because I was doing it based on...I had a criteria but I could put in what I wanted and use whatever. But now that I'm taking from asking teachers, well, what do

you want me to talk about it, it's a little different I guess. You're trying to make sure that you have everything that they want. So, the only thing I'm apprehensive about is the lessons. Teaching the lessons and making sure that the kids understand. I don't want to teach and everybody's sitting there looking like, what is she talking about? Or the kids get chatty because they're bored.

About halfway through the school year, Maya described a lesson that Brandy had been teaching and allowing Maya to observe and assist; the goal was for Maya to be able to teach the lesson as well. Maya's description of how she felt during the teaching of this lesson provides insight into the difficulty she was having reconciling her pre-service understanding of the roles of the LMS with the way her mentor figured herself as an LMS.

She does the almanac, the World Fact Book, the dictionaries, the encyclopedias, she does the newspapers. We use the document lamp to show the kids the World Book. We'll ask them to turn the pages and the first couple of times she did it I was like, okay, I know what these resources are and I know how to use them. But trying to perform it was like, oh my goodness. There was so much going on and I had to have the kids...she sits them here and she assigns somebody at the table to pass out the resources and then to collect them and kids are taking notes, and somebody says, I didn't get that! And I'm trying to say, this is what this book is for, and I'm going over examples and I'm going, gosh, she made this look so easy. And then I'm hoping that the kids actually got something from it because I was so busy trying to make sure that I was doing things right.

This performance anxiety was evidence of Maya's lack of confidence in her level of preparedness to perform a function that Brandy seemed to feel was more important than reading stories or checking out books. At the end of the year, when she reflected on what was challenging, she mentioned keeping students engaged and on task during lessons. She felt that this was difficult "because it's not normally what they come to the media center for. You're asking a question about something that you just taught, a concept, and they're like, 'When can we check out books?'"

At the beginning of the year, when I asked Maya whether she thought the LMS job was a teaching position, she answered quite positively in the affirmative;

however, the types of teaching she went on to describe did not include anything that resembled the lessons she would find herself trying to teach later on in the year.

Everything I do, whether I'm teaching a student how to locate the books, whether I'm saying this is fiction, this is easy, this is biography, this is how you can tell this is a fiction book, this is...I call it their address...this is their address, or their call number. If I'm showing them or demonstrating how to look up the book or the title or the author on the computer. Everything is kind of teaching the students and it's something that you have to reinforce and reinforce and continuously reinforce. So, I do feel like they're (LMSs) teachers and I feel like the other teachers are kind of implanting it in their brain on a daily basis and I'm teaching independence with it.

At this point, Maya was not even including herself in the group called media specialists; she says, "...I do feel like they're teachers..." Although she espoused her conviction that LMSs were teachers, she had not really had the opportunity to observe it or execute it in practice. When she did, she found it not as comfortable as the other LMS role that she seemed to identify with more strongly – that of reader advisor.

Maya thought of herself as an avid reader and lover of books. One of her strongest motivations for entering the field of school librarianship was her love of reading and her belief that one of the most important roles that the LMS should play is that of the provider of resources and matching of books to readers. Early in Maya's first year of practice, I asked her to write an 'elevator speech' describing what she did for a living. Her reply was, "I encourage people to read different genres for a living - in hopes that they will develop a love for reading at an early age." At the end of the year, she stated that the mission of her library media program as follows:

I would say enjoyment – allowing kids to pick out books that they want. Not necessarily looking for an AR book or something on their level but solely what they want. I guess allowing them to try different things – introducing them to different books.

The figured world of Winfrey Theme Elementary did not value certain types of reading among its students. It did not support students reading books that simply interested them for pure pleasure – books on Army Rangers, motorcycles, race cars or armored vehicles. Administrators, teachers and, sometimes, other library staff believed that students needed to read fiction (chapter) books that were on or below their grade level. This understanding of the figured world of reading at Winfrey was very perplexing to Maya who believed strongly that students should be allowed to borrow a variety of books from the media center; she particularly believed that African American males were being turned off to reading by being forced to borrow library books that were not pertinent or appealing to them. She also felt that she had a better grasp of what children want and should be reading than the classroom teachers.

By the end of the school year, Maya was firmly entrenched in an LMS identity of reading expert. She believed strongly in her own ability to promote literacy practices that would have long term effects on students' reading behaviors. Teachers at the school lamented their students' low reading and comprehension levels; Maya attributed these deficits, in part, to the excessive use of literature (fiction/chapter books) in the school. When the teachers pointed out the students' shortcomings in reading, Maya answered:

I think one problem might be that you all push chapter books. Most of the chapter books are fiction and it's not real relevant information. It's talking dogs and animals and, I mean, it holds their attention and that's what they like. But I said, if you would let them check out some of the...whether it's a pro wrestling book or a race car book, they're reading actual facts that you have to recall to understand what's going on on the next page. They say, well, those aren't Accelerated Reader. And we say, yeah, they are. Let them have their choice! Oh, gosh, if they could only check out a book on something they like.

Maya's strong feelings around the topic of helping students learn to love reading were rooted in her own love of reading as well as her goals and desires for her elementary school-age daughter. She frequently reflected on how she would feel if she thought her daughter were being spoken to like the students at Winfrey and hated the thought of her own child not being given the opportunity to learn to love reading through the freedom to explore a variety of texts. Getting to know students and developing the collection to reflect their interests became a high priority for Maya.

I want to know who they are, their grade level, what their interests are. Because we have little boys who like Army Ranger books and all of those are like 5.0 (reading level). Finding out their needs and trying to order or look for books that will suit their needs. In the meantime, before we get to order more, give them something else, another topic or something that they may be interested in - especially for the boys. And begging the teachers to please, even if he can't read this book, let him look at the pictures or at least try.

### **Summary**

Maya, a would-be teacher who had been thwarted by her undergraduate school's loss of an education program, dabbled in education for over a decade before making the decision to try and become an LMS. Her need and desire to find a well-paying, steady job in education led her to explore the options available to her in the state in which she lived. Through her friend, Diana, she learned that library media certification was available to those who earned a master's in library media technology and that prior teaching certification was not needed. Maya's perceptions of the LMS roles and responsibilities, arrived at through her personal history and observations in the schools in which she worked, created an image of the LMS as a literacy expert and reader advisor – a job that did not look overly demanding but would provide a decent living and generous holidays.

The master's program in library media at Eastern College introduced Maya to a concept of the library media profession that she found somewhat intimidating. She had not observed LMSs acting as technology leaders, instructional consultants, or teachers of skills that went beyond basic library and information technology use. During her internship experiences, the tasks she observed and was engaged in were primarily administrative: working with the online catalog; circulating materials; helping students find information. During one of the five years that it took her to complete her master's program, Maya worked as a clerk in an elementary school where the LMS never read to students and did not offer instruction. The idealized model of the school LMS that was offered at the university was not the reality that Maya witnessed.

Upon joining the staff of Winfrey Theme Elementary, Maya entered a figured world of elementary education that valued "traditional" curricula and teaching strategies: rote memorization; teacher centered classrooms; and discrete content instruction. The LMS was considered, primarily, a provider of breaks and warehouse of books. Her co-LMS, Brandy, acting as Maya's mentor and self-appointed trainer, impressed upon her the importance of designing and teaching lessons to students on such topics as author's purpose and the difference between fiction and non-fiction. Maya began to figure herself as a resident expert on literacy practices and collection development that would facilitate students' becoming enthusiastic and successful readers. Her response to the staff's lack of flexibility around what students were encouraged to read drove her to think of herself as a champion for the students' right to choose his or her own reading materials from the library media center. She felt most confident and sure of her skills in helping connect students with the books that would lead them to further reading. She also

positioned herself as one person in a large school who thought it important to take the time to get to know individual students' interests and reading levels in order to help bring about the best matches between children and texts. A story she told about a third grade student whose teacher forced him to check out a *Clifford, the Big Red Dog* book demonstrates the strength of her feeling:

I had a student come to me and say he wanted a chapter book. I found a book for him, it was a new chapter book and it was from the easy. His teacher snatched book out of his hand and said, No. Go get something out of the easy section. And I said, this is from the easy section and I had him read a page. The teacher said, He needs to get Clifford or something. He cannot read this. I felt really bad. It was not only embarrassing but it was discouraging. I feel like he's probably discouraged because he's probably reading books that he feels he has no relation to.

Maya clearly saw herself as more sensitive to students' feelings and reading interests than most of the school's classroom teachers. This identity, one where she figured herself as an adult with an intense desire to help create lifelong readers, was what made her stand apart from the teachers, her co-LMS, and the figured world of Winfrey Theme Elementary School. She was still learning to teach lessons; still learning about what principals and teachers expected; but she felt sure that her beliefs about children and reading were sound and she was beginning to stand up to teachers and challenge that belief system that said that students must read fiction in school to practice reading. Along with this strong conviction, Maya, at the end of the school year, was beginning to plan how she would do some things differently the following school year. She wanted to have some reading celebrations or programs during the school day and was planning on making a presentation to the principal to see if he would approve. Maya was worried about how much work it would be if she were assigned to a library alone without a clerk; she felt that it would be like

starting over again from scratch. However, she remained positive and looked forward to expanding her instructional repertoire.

### **Epilogue**

Maya was another one of the LMSs who did not initially receive a renewal contract when they were first issued. She, like the other five whose contracts were delayed, did eventually receive one and was given a new assignment to a different elementary school where she would work alone. Maya, who had been diagnosed with a serious health issue earlier in the school year, had undergone major surgery shortly after school was out and before she received her new assignment. When she was contacted by the principal of her new school, she was still recovering at home and unable to drive. She promised her new administrator that as soon as she was given permission to drive by her doctors that she would come over to the school so that they could meet. Maya felt that their initial meeting went well and Maya, although nervous about being an LMS in a large school without any help, was relieved that she would have a job and paycheck.

However, Maya was another victim of the reduction in force in the HCSD. Approximately a month before she was to return to work, she was informed that her services were not required and was pressured to resign from her position, which she eventually did. Unfortunately, the late date of the notice to the laid off employees meant that openings were few and far between. Maya was still searching for a job at the time of the writing of this paper.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## LARA

*“So it just seemed like a low-stress, kinda low-key job. You can hide out, you can close the library when you want to. You can send kids back to class when you want to. You could take a break and kick back and put your feet up.”*

**Personal Biography and History**

Lara was scheduled to come into the Department of Media Services for a pre-screening meet and greet; one of my colleagues asked me if I remembered her from a previous meeting. I replied that I did not, but my colleague insisted that I should. She reminded me that we had met Lara a year before, right after she had completed her LMS certification, and that we had been rather surprised by some of the answers she had provided to our questions. I still didn't remember Lara; but after she arrived at our office and began to talk the memory came rushing back.

Lara, a 33 year old African American female, had visited us in Media Services the previous year to let us know that she was anxious to move from the classroom to the library media center. She had completed her Master of Education in Library Media and Instructional Technology at Eastern College and University and wanted desperately to find a job as an LMS. When the three administrators in our office met her for the first time, Lara was asked (as are most candidates) why she wanted to become a media specialist. Lara's answer was surprisingly honest: she told us that she was completely burned out on being a classroom teacher and longingly imagined herself in her library office, feet up on the desk, reading the newspaper and drinking coffee. Her pre-service perception of the job she desired was of ease and relaxation. Needless to say, this answer was not the one usually given during what most novice LMSs understood to be an audition with a department that could influence a principal's decision on whom to interview. Now, one year

later, Lara was returning. Still seeking an LMS position, she was visiting the Department of Media Services to reiterate her desire to join the library media profession.

Lara grew up in the southeastern United States and attended public schools. Her memories of elementary school libraries were vague – she really wasn't sure whether there had been media centers in the schools she attended. She did remember the library in her high school, but claimed to have never used it nor could she remember the librarian who worked there. Research or other projects that required library resources were completed at the public library. In fact, Lara's library memories were all centered on the public library. She described herself as "a reader" during her childhood and explained that her aunt frequently took her to the public library to get books to feed her reading habit. She also claimed to be a "collector" of books, hating to throw them away even when they became worn and tattered. Although Lara remembered herself being an avid reader as a child, she claimed to not read much anymore due to a lack of time and an inability to concentrate for extended periods.

I read a lot of books and I loved to read. And I was kind of like a collector of books so it was like I was a little packrat. I didn't care if the book was falling apart, I couldn't throw it away. Um..so I spent a lot of time reading. Spent a lot of time at the public library, a lot of time checking out books, and I spent a lot of time reading. At least up until...once you get to middle school sometimes it kind of dissipates.

Although libraries and books were an important part of Lara's childhood, she admitted that the librarians who worked in the libraries she visited were not influential in her life. She said, "No, I can't remember a one."

When Lara graduated from high school, her plan was to pursue a nursing career. This plan, however, was quickly derailed when an acquaintance of Lara's

family was shot in front of the family home and she found herself horrified by her inability to deal calmly with the crisis and the blood. She does not remember exactly how she decided to become a teacher, but she did remember that once she had chosen that career path that she “wanted to be this world changing teacher.” She attended a state school that had a reputation for having a high quality College of Education and she chose to major in middle grades education sometime after her freshman year. She was most interested in teaching language arts and social studies, as the subjects of math and science “were too hard.” Lara’s use of school libraries did not increase during her college years; she remembered going into the university library a couple of times but “certainly didn’t check out anything.”

Upon graduation from college, Lara began her teaching career in the Hugo County School District (HCSD) as a 6<sup>th</sup> grade language arts teacher. She described this year as a “nightmare” – the combination of being a new teacher with unruly middle school students created a work environment that was very different from her pre-service expectations of teaching.

I think it was largely because I was fresh out of college so I had all these ideas that kids were going to sit down and they were going to learn and they were going to love learning and school was just going to be a peaceful place and oh my God. Those were the worst kids. It was a pretty rough year. And then I had to be so tough. You had to be tough all day and that was so exhausting.

At the end of that year, when the principal announced that the school would need to “lose” some teachers because of declining enrollment, Lara eagerly volunteered to be moved to a different school. She accepted a position at a District elementary school where she taught 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade math for the next nine years. She found elementary students easier to deal with but, after her fifth or sixth year of teaching, began brainstorming ways to escape the classroom.

Lara cited a variety of motivations for wishing to leave classroom teaching for the media center: “scripted” content curricula that allowed for little creativity or flexibility in instruction; boredom with repeating the same lessons year after year; and apathetic, unmotivated students. The lure of the library was Lara’s perception of the relative benefits of not being a classroom teacher: lower stress; ability to send students back to class at any time; opportunities to take breaks during the school day; having an office; being the manager of a budget; and time to relax. Some of these perceptions arose directly from Lara’s observations of the LMSs who worked in the school libraries where she taught. The librarian at the middle school where she began her career had not made an impression; when asked if she remembered that person or if she ever took her students to the library, Lara responded, “No way!” She did offer up a vague recollection: “I think I do remember...she was a little short white lady, dark hair. She looked like a typical librarian,” and laughingly insisted that this person was certainly not the inspiration for her choosing a career in library media.

The LMS who worked at the elementary school for eight of the nine years Lara taught there acted as a mentor to Lara and talked to her about the types of certification programs to which she could apply. She “mostly figured it out on her own,” however, eventually applying and being accepted to a M.Ed. program with a major in Library Media and Instructional Technology that was offered in a hybrid (face-to-face and online) format.

I did some research on my own. I really didn’t have a lot of people to reach out to because you know the field is kind of small. It’s small and then the people who are in it, once they’re in it that’s it. They’re not going anywhere. The field is so small that I really didn’t have a lot of people that I could reach out and ask where should I go? And people looked at me crazy. I think I looked at myself crazy, “Really? You gotta have a master’s degree to check out books and read stories? Like, wow!”

At the time that Lara finished her master's program, there were limited LMS openings in the District; however, her first visit to the Department of Media Services was her initial attempt to throw her name into the ring if openings did materialize. One year later in Spring 2011, Lara believed that her dream job was available – the LMS at the elementary school where she taught was leaving to pursue a Ph.D. and Lara hoped that she could transition directly into that position. Unfortunately, those hopes were dashed due to the District's closing and consolidation of eight schools that Spring. The LMSs who became displaced from the closing schools were reassigned to schools with openings and Lara's school's LMS position was filled by one of the displaced. Later in the summer, however, another position became available due to a reassignment of an LMS and, several weeks after school began in August 2011, Lara was reassigned from her classroom to the Brookside Elementary School library media center.

### **Pre-Service Experiences and Perceptions**

Lara admitted that, as a classroom teacher, the library media center was not a place she frequented – either for herself or with her students. Early in her career teaching 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade math, she did not perceive the LMS or the media center as vital components of her instructional toolkit. The LMS (Ms. Roberts) who worked at her elementary school during her first year teaching there, however, was known in the District as a hardworking veteran with a strong program and high expectations. Ms. Roberts retired at the end of that year, but she made an impression on Lara, who said of her, “She was serious because she went on to win awards somewhere.” She also recalled,

I was a new teacher so I really didn't use the media center a whole lot but I knew that she always knew where stuff was and always knew, you know,

where resources were. She did a newsletter. She was, like, a real for real librarian. And she took it very seriously. I was discussing this with one of my colleagues the other day and she was talking about Ms. Roberts and how she told them one time if they were coming into the media center with their kids and they were having story time that the teachers needed to be an example and be a good listener and model good listening to the kids and that they couldn't talk while she was having story time and they certainly couldn't be on their phone or they couldn't have out the newspaper - that they needed to model good listening. Cuz she was SEER-EE-US about that library and being a librarian.

Lara's awareness of some of the resources available through her school's library media program grew with her experience.

As I progressed through my tenure as a teacher then I started realizing, oh, he's in there, he's got the media center, he's got books, he's got computers. Let me go in there and see what he's got, see what he can do.

The LMS who provided Lara with her longest and most enduring example was Paul, the young man who prompted her to believe that becoming an LMS would allow her "to kick my feet up! To put my feet up on the desk and rear back in my chair and relax!" When I questioned Lara as to whether she had actually witnessed an LMS engaged in this behavior, she emphatically replied, "Absolutely! Reading their newspaper, they're just in their office!" Obviously, being an LMS appeared to be a much less stressful job than that of classroom teacher and appealed to Lara for that reason. When asked what she thought the job was all about, she described what she and according to her, most teachers, felt about the LMS.

Teachers are first, territorial, and then we have this mindset of can't nobody do what we do and can't nobody teach your kids but you. But I was there, too, so I know how they think. This is the lesson, they gotta learn this and I gotta be the one to teach it to 'em. Nobody else can help. You know, a lot of teachers think like that. So, I guess just checking out books. Checking out books and reading, having story time and having story time and checking out books. Putting books on the shelves. That is probably about it. That's it. Checking out books. Reading stories.

Once she began her master's program, however, Lara's original beliefs about what the job entailed began to be challenged. She found the courses to be demanding

and considered the requirements of the program - driving to campus for class twice a week and attending classes online – a major commitment. It was this preparation program that provided Lara with eye-opening insight into what the LMS job should, theoretically, entail. When asked what she found surprising, she answered,

Just what all the media specialists are responsible for! And I know another thing that drew me to it was I would have an office, and I would have a BUDGET! I'd have an office - I'd have a budget, I'd get to read stories to kids and check out books. That was it. And then I started taking those classes because they have a serious program at the University and those ladies are serious. And I guess that's when it finally hit me that this is a for-real position and this is a for-real program. I'm not just checking out books and reading stories. Wow! Because I almost didn't make it out! One of my courses I made a C! It was tough. It was a lot of work.

Lara did admit that her classroom teaching experience offered her certain advantages in the master's program, particularly in classes where lesson planning for collaboration with teachers was emphasized. She understood collaboration to be supporting what the teachers had going on in the classroom.

Like, if they are working on the weather then, you know, when they come to the media center you should try to find some way to incorporate that. They shouldn't just hear a story about the three little bears and the big bad pig. Just find some way, even if you are reading a story, that it be about weather or if you've got a video or .. you know. And extending what's going on in the classroom and trying to make those two things meet and connect in some kind of way.

Lara seemed to grasp how challenging it might be to actually get teachers to collaborate in the manner described in school. Having been a classroom teacher who did not perceive of the LMS as having anything of any great value to offer, she admitted that it would probably be difficult to get all teachers into the media center.

'Cuz you got some teachers, they don't care what you got going on in the media center, they're not coming. They're not even coming to check out books. So I know it depends on the individual.

Lara was allowed to complete her internship at the school where she taught. She took a couple of personal/professional days in order to spend her time in the

media center. She conducted story time, checked out books, and helped the students when they came to the library. These days in the library media center helped cement Lara's opinion that being an LMS was a stress-free, easy job – one that she would very much like to have.

Lara was surprised by her graduate program's heavy emphasis on technology and collaboration with teachers and admitted that she was somewhat intimidated by what "a big responsibility" the job was compared to that of a classroom teacher.

At least if you're in the classroom you just have to be bothered with these little 22 or 23 kids. But...it took me...I was looking for a job but then I really wasn't. And then, it was like, nobody's leaving these jobs. No, no, there aren't any jobs.

As Lara moved through the program, her growing awareness of the responsibilities of the LMS coupled with the scarcity of job openings lessened her zeal for leaving the classroom and took the pressure off of her job search. Lara taught for another full year before beginning to seriously seek an LMS position and, at that point, it was the position available at her own school that really interested her. When it became apparent that that position was not going to be hers, Lara prepared for another year in the classroom. To her surprise, when the new school year (2011) rolled around, there was one position open and Lara applied. Although she was already contracted as a classroom teacher and had been assigned her students for the year, her principal supported her desire to advance herself and helped to make the move happen. Whether Lara felt ready to be an LMS might have still been in question, but she was definitely ready to get out of the classroom.

### **Brookside Elementary School's Figured World - Context, Discourse, Culture**

School had been back in session for three weeks when Lara began working at Brookside Elementary. Brookside is one of a small number of schools in the District

with an extremely large proportion of refugee students. The area of the city where Brookside is located is one that has become a center of refugee resettlement and the population of the school represents some of the greatest diversity in the District: 39% of the students are Asian; 53% are black; 66% of the students are limited English proficient and 94% qualify for free and reduced lunch. Brookside's entire staff is faced with unique challenges as they attempt to help not only the students but their families deal with the myriad challenges inherent in learning to live in a new country. With over 900 students enrolled (one of the largest elementary schools in the District) Brookside was assigned a full time library media clerk to work alongside the LMS in the library media center. The year prior to Lara's employment, an LMS had been assigned to Brookside who had not wanted to work there and who spent a good portion of the year trying to figure out an escape route. She did, indeed, find a way to leave the school and the opening Lara filled resulted from her predecessor's transfer to another library media center. The principal was relieved to have a new LMS, one whom he hoped would "do something." As Lara explained,

He was just really looking for somebody to come in and do something, get something going for the kids. Get the kids involved in the media center. Get the kids wanting to come to the media center. That was his biggest thing. Get somebody in here who would be willing to do something.

As much as the principal, Mr. Patton, was certain that the LMS that had been there before Lara was unsatisfactory, he did not seem to have a clear idea of what it was he was looking for from his new LMS. He had hoped to find someone young and energetic who would be willing to stay late and take on some of the many jobs that needed to be done in a large school with an extremely needy population. However, because he was not allowed to post the job and hire until after the school year had begun, most, if not all, of the LMS candidates who had been available had

found employment. Mr. Patton was certainly hopeful that Lara would be a departure from the previous year's disappointments, but once she was in place he essentially retreated and left her to chart her own course. As she pointed out, Mr. Patton was extremely busy and had more important things on his mind.

This school is so huge and I think right now he's just so busy because the school is in needs improvement and I think it's like in the second level of needs improvement, so, I don't think that the focus right now is, What is she doing in the library? He hasn't had time to check and see what I'm doing. I know that's the thing right now. He comes in here, he does the morning announcements, and then it's like catch me if you can.

Lara recognized that having a principal that was too busy to micromanage library operations gave her an opportunity to get settled into the new job without too much scrutiny. On the other hand, she seemed to feel a bit abandoned and wished for some direction or positive reinforcement.

I don't have to deal with him too much; it's given me time to get acclimated. It's kind of a catch 22. But then the other half of it...not that you necessarily do things for accolades or a pat on the head but you would like for something to get noticed every now and then.

While talking about the principal's expectations, she posited that there were probably not many principals who really understood the role of the LMS.

Unless they've seen a really good example. If you wanted to be one of those flying under the radar kind of persons you could. It's the same with the gifted program. A lot of administrators don't know for real what's supposed to happen and what can happen. So it's kinda like, not kind of, but it's like that with the media center, too. I could just...

Throughout the school year, Lara felt that the administration's general disregard for the importance of the library program was demonstrated through their choice to close it for testing and other events fairly regularly.

I still don't think he thinks it's important. Because if anything is happening they shut down the media center. Testing. You know, we have a big ESOL population so we did ACCESS testing for like a whole month. So we were shut down every day for a month for like two or three hours in the morning.

Lara was actually somewhat overwhelmed by the size and level of need of the population at Brookside; she had been relatively unfamiliar with the school when she accepted the job and, coming from a much smaller school, was not sure how she would serve such a large population. She quickly learned that it was an expectation of both the principal and the kindergarten and first grade teachers that those grades would come to the library on a fixed schedule to check out books. The seven kindergarten classes and seven first grade classes were seen every week for a 30 minutes story time and book checkout. Beyond that expectation, however, Lara felt that many of the teachers had no understanding of the role of the library and LMS and that many placed little value on the media center or its offerings. When asked if she felt that she could help teachers achieve their instructional goals, she answered,

Yeah, I think I fit into that picture but I don't think the teachers think I do. And that's the hard part. Because right now they have the same concept that I had. Check out books, read a story. I'm bringing my kids in for story time. We're coming in for the first 15 minutes we want you to read a story and then we want you to check us out a book. I don't know if that's all that they've seen or that's all they believe a media specialist to be and to do so, I just know I've got some work to do to change that. I know it's going to take a little time but it won't take that much time because when they come I'll say, Hey, this is what we're doing. I'm not reading 3 Little Pigs today. I'm not reading Case of the Bad Stripes or whatever these kids read. This is what we're doing today.

The attitudes and expectations of teachers at Brookside were observably bent toward providing them with a break. The library had been part of the specials rotation during the years prior to Lara's immediate predecessor, and the teachers who had taught there for more than one year hoped that Lara would provide that type of service as well. Early on a Monday morning at the beginning of the school year, a Kindergarten teacher brought her class to the media center, catching Lara by surprise. Although the teacher had signed up on the electronic calendar for library time, the new calendar for the week had not been printed out and placed on the

circulation desk and Lara was not prepared. The teacher showed her annoyance and stated simply, "Well, just read them a story or something!" and left the room quickly.

Lara informed me that this teacher would take every second of the next thirty minutes to attend to other business.

I would have to say it's just past experiences, you know? They don't really think that this is important. They just want to bring their kids and then they want to disappear. Now, I don't have a problem with that. Ms. Culpepper (media clerk) doesn't like it. And I guess that just comes back to being a classroom teacher. I know sometimes you're just like, I just gotta get 5 minutes or I just gotta get to the bathroom. Can I use the bathroom? So, it's not a big deal to me unless you've got a horrible class. Then, no, you've got to stay. They don't think this is a very important job I don't think.

Other teachers did not want to bring their students to the library at all. There was one group that actually seemed hostile to Lara and ignored her invitations and entreaties to take advantage of her services. The reasons for several of the teachers' hesitancy about bringing their students to the library remained a mystery throughout the school year. When I asked Lara why she thought that these teachers were not bringing their students she answered, "I don't know. I'm clueless. They're kind of like snobs, though. That's what I'm getting from them. That's the feel that I get. Because one of them, the head ringleader, she's like snotty towards Ms. Culpepper, too."

Ms. Culpepper, the media clerk who had been assigned to this school two years ago after being laid off, had worked for many years at a nearby elementary school with a similar population. Ms. Reddick, the LMS at her old school, had retired several years before but Ms. Culpepper had held her up as the model LMS to the newbies with whom she had worked since. Ms. Culpepper, past retirement age herself but one year shy of being vested in the state's retirement plan, was an old-fashioned school library aid who felt it was her responsibility to train Lara in the

“right ways” of doing things. Lara did not seem to mind Ms. Culpepper’s tutelage and listened patiently to advice on weeding, collection development, and dealing with teachers. Lara was the second new LMS that she had worked with in the past three years and she appeared tired of having to break in new ones.

The figured world of Brookside Elementary School was greatly influenced by the stressful circumstances that working with an extremely diverse, multi-cultural population can produce. It provided the LMS with little fodder for identity construction due to the members’ lack of understanding of where a library program could fit into the predominantly English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) instructional program. The previous year’s unfortunate LMS placement seemed to have had a detrimental effect on teacher and principal expectations, as even the most superficial services were lacking. Many teachers seemed to avoid the library while others thought of it as a place to drop off students so that they could get a 30 minute break. With an under-privileged, non-English speaking student population, both the principal and the teachers seemed understandably stressed over the challenge of achieving the kinds of quantitative improvements in standardized test scores required by the District and the state. Where the library media program and LMS fit into those efforts did not seem clear to any members of Brookside’s figured world, including Lara.

### **Lara’s LMS Identity**

Lara’s ascendance to her LMS position began with some drama. Because she had already begun the school year as a classroom teacher, the Human Resources Department (HR) of the Hugo County School District was not sure that they would allow her to move into a different position which would create an opening for a teacher. Lara was actually told she had been awarded the job and then told that she

would have to stay where she was. During this uncertain time, Lara's desire to leave the classroom grew significantly. The opportunity to become an LMS had been so tantalizingly close and the snatching away of it made it that much more desirable. Lara waged an impressive campaign to change HR's mind, calling everyone she believed might be able to influence the decision. After several long weeks, Lara was successful and was released from her teaching position to become a library media specialist. She was indescribably excited.

The excitement gave way rather quickly to the same confusion and nervousness that plagues most new LMSs. Starting three weeks into the school year complicated Lara's efforts to establish her program. A substitute had been there and, working alongside Ms. Culpepper, the media clerk, a routine had already been put into place. Lara found that attempting to change what had been established, even in that short time, difficult.

Being aware of Lara's motivations for becoming an LMS and her pre-service perceptions of what the job entailed, I was surprised by some of her reactions to her new position. Her pre-service expectations had included the idea that she would be spending a great deal of time doing story times for young students. However, one of her first reflections upon starting the job let me know how much she disliked reading aloud.

It's funny when I tell people I hate reading stories out loud. You could never tell. I guess once I start I just get all into it. It's so many words! Sooooo many words. I've thought about skipping some pages.

Observations confirmed this distaste; Lara rushed through story times and seemed relieved when she was finished reading out loud. Student engagement was difficult to measure at Brookside because so many of the students did not speak English. When questioned about whether she had any strategies for dealing with her ELL

population, Lara admitted her frustration but did not indicate that she had sought assistance from the ESOL teachers or any other sources for information on adapting library services for non-English speaking children.

In Kindergarten, we read stories and talk about ‘em and I try to do like other little stuff. I try to pull in some stuff they’re doing in class but that doesn’t always work. I try. I knew that they were talking about the sun so I did a little non-fiction thing with the sun. With our school being such a high ESOL population it’s just kinda like...they understand nothing.

Lara, like many new LMSs, exhibited surprise over how busy she was daily and the amount of time many of the tasks she was assigned required. She laughed when I asked how often her feet were upon the desk. During the first part of the year she found herself overwhelmed with the daily tasks of checking out, shelving, weeding, and ordering books. Coupled with seeing the Kindergarten and first grade classes every week, she found herself to be “hustling” almost every day, all day.

Way more busy. Yesss! Like all day, boom boom! You can’t even get in the door good because, you know, we have those iPads so I have to keep everything locked up. All the laptop carts and iPad carts and the multimedia carts and so the teachers have to gather that stuff from me so they’re dead in your face first thing in the morning. They want their carts so that’s first thing in the morning. And then classes and then, when I catch a minute or two, I’m shelving or straightening up. Then I run over here in my office and straighten up.

In her preparation program, Lara had learned that to create collaborative relationships with teachers an LMS needs to place themselves frequently in positions where the teacher/LMS team can plan together and share goals and objectives for student learning. School LMSs have been fighting the image of story time drop-off-spot for years. It is widely accepted in the library media profession that collaborative, co-teaching with the classroom teacher is the most effective model for designing and implementing instruction that imparts 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. However, many teachers still wish to drop off their students and take a break. Lara’s lack of

clarity on her role as the LMS and the examples she had seen of LMS behavior combined to produce an understanding of the job and herself as LMS that could not be erased by the graduate program's strong focus on collaboration. As Lara entered the LMS profession, she continued to strongly identify with classroom teachers and allowed them to treat their students' time in the library media center as a break because she empathized with their plight. This empathy, however, allowed for the sacrifice of meaningful collaboration with the teachers and perpetuated their lack of understanding of the instructional value that could reside in the library media center.

Like with collaborating...we have our little classes. The teachers, you know, they don't necessarily have to stay 'cuz I've been in the classroom, I can manage a class so if they need to go use the restroom, 'cuz I've worked with a lot of media specialists that didn't even want you to go to the restroom. I do...okay, go use the restroom real quick.

Lara recognized that changing the ways in which teachers at Brookside thought about and used the library media center would be challenge. She felt somewhat helpless against the overwhelming culture and beliefs that existed before her arrival and her principal's lack of support did not help dispel her frustration. She, however, was not silent and troubled the existing Discourse.

So it's gotten to the point where they just come and just dump 'em and go and then maybe they'll come back on time and maybe they won't. Or you can be in the middle of a lesson and they need a kid, they're snatching the kid outta here. (exasperated sigh). I've been just about...I'm very confrontational, first of all, but I've been trying...but I can't battle all of these people. Everybody would hate me if I said what I wanted...not wanted to say but said something every time I wanted to say something to somebody. It's crazy! It's just not important. Who cares about the media center? That I would change. And also if I could just really understand what I'm supposed to be doing.

Two separate constructs were creating the situation that Lara found so frustration. One was the teachers' lack of understanding of the myriad benefits available to their students from information literacy instruction and learning

opportunities that can be provided by the LMS and Lara's own lack of understanding of the LMS role and the strategies she needed to employ to move the school toward a more effective model of librarian/teacher partnership.

That's killing me, too. Damn! Am I supposed to be reading stories to these kids or am I supposed to be doing this? Maybe...? So, I'm still kind of all over the place with what I'm supposed to be doing with these folks, these kids. The teachers, of course, it's like zero collaboration but I'm not even worried about the teachers now. Just, what am I really supposed to be doing with these kids?

The time lapse between the completion of her library media certification and her employment as the LMS at Brookside may also have had an impact on her identify formation. Lara did not remember much about the classes she took (other than that they were hard) and had not revisited many of the key concepts to which she was introduced during her master's degree. When asked where she got ideas for the ways she was building her library program she answered, "Not my master's program. There probably was some good stuff in there, I've just forgotten it all." To a question regarding whether information literacy skills were a focus of her graduate program Lara answered,

I don't know how I keep forgetting that because I know that. Like, I was asking my mentor today, where are the standards that we're supposed to be teaching? And I keep getting my job kind of not totally clear on exactly what I'm supposed to be doing and what I'm supposed to be teaching.

Her attempts to engage students in activities that would foster information literacy, particularly younger students, seemed to never quite take off. Some of this was because Lara had not been exposed to an effective instructional model for teaching information literacy skills at all, much less in a high ELL population school.

I'm scrambling some days. Like, uhhh...you're in Kindergarten and I know you don't know how to do that. I know one time it was a disaster. I forgot what the assignment was but I was like I know they can't do this. Sometimes

the expectations may be too low and then another time it might be entirely too high. I was like, forget it! Let's read a story and check out books.

Having been a classroom teacher, Lara was accustomed to having curricula, textbooks, pacing guides, and benchmark tests that were prescribed and provided the roadmap to her teaching. Although Lara cited the relatively unstructured nature of the library media center as one of the aspects that appealed to her when choosing the career, she discovered that the ambiguity around the LMS job roles and functions somewhat frustrating. She expressed a wish for more defined expectations of what she should be doing in the library and stated, "The flexibility to teach different things is nice but I wouldn't complain if I had a pacing guide. As a new teacher-librarian I question what my role and duties and responsibilities are all the time."

I need somebody to sit and say, Look, this is what you're responsible for. I need a list is what I need. This is what you're responsible for doing and teaching and making sure the kids know. And then I know that other stuff can fall up under it but if I just knew, okay, you need to be sure your kids know how to use the dictionary, use the encyclopedia...So, I keep getting fuzzy as to for real what I'm supposed to be doing. You know what I'm saying?

By the end of the school year, Lara, who had looked forward to putting her feet up and relaxing in her office, had undergone a marked shift in perception about the library media program and the job of LMS. She knew that she was working hard, that there were not enough hours in the day to complete all the tasks assigned to her, and that the faculty and administration at Brookside Elementary School did not think of the library or the LMS as important. Her frustration with this lack of respect for the library boiled over on a number of topics. Lara felt that she deserved acknowledgement for all that she did. Lara spent an inordinate amount of time selecting the books and materials that she would order with her state allotment

funds. She painstakingly read reviews and chose items that she felt were needed to support the curriculum and the unique needs of her predominantly ELL population. About material selection she said, “Very important! If we don’t have those resources then, you know, where else are they gonna get ‘em?”

Another topic that seemed to stump Lara as she wrestled with her own persona as an LMS and what she felt was important was getting students to return their library books. The traditional activity of circulation, usually one of the easier tasks to get a handle on in an elementary school library, caused Lara a great deal of consternation. She seemed to feel that her success as an LMS was inextricably linked to the ability to get students to return books. Part of her trouble she attributed to the students’ lack of English language proficiency. It was difficult to communicate to these students the expectation of books being returned in a timely manner and in the same condition that they left the library.

Now, first grade I get a little bit more out of them. We’ll read and talk about beginning, middle and end, sequential order, and those type of reading skills. So I get a little more out of first grade. I’m trying to teach them how to be responsible with their library books. That’s a challenge. We had to get ugly quite a few times! Had to shake some kids down! Where’s the book?! That’s been a big challenge. We have to exaggerate everything. We tell ‘em: “We have over 100 new books coming just for first grade” and they’re like “woo woo woo” but they’re still coming back without a book.

The LMS identity that seemed available to Lara provided her little guidance about what she was supposed to be doing in her library media center. She mostly stuck with the basics – circulation, ordering, checking out and managing equipment, and conducting traditional story times. One of the interesting characteristics of the figured world of Brookside ES was the group of teachers who did not want to bring their students to the media center. Lara found this behavior very upsetting and actually grew angry as she talked about it. She felt that, for some unknown reason,

a group of teachers, all women, were not bringing their students to the library because of her. During several of our conversations she vented about their behavior.

I keep kinda taking it personal, like a personal attack. So, that's what I gotta remember. Because at first, third grade - I was boiling mad with them. Like, I thought...well, there's this one teacher she just thinks she's all that, you know? And I've even gone to them a couple of times face to face other than an email. "Oh, are you going to bring your classes down?" "Uh, I don't know. I'm still thinking about it." Seriously. Like, what is there to think about? I was just fuming! And I kind of feel like it's monkey see monkey do cuz the other teachers are like, well, they do what she does.

These teachers' aloofness and a lack of principal involvement left Lara feeling like no one thought that the library and its resources were important.

Cuz around here I get the feeling that it's not important. Um...It's just not important. The principal, I mean, I know he was gung ho about having somebody a little different in here that would do some different things but I still don't think he thinks it's important.

After working in the library for a short time, she had begun to think of library media instruction, resources, and her own purpose as extremely valuable and wanted her colleagues to recognize this, too.

Lara found herself very impatient when working with younger children. She had spent her teaching career with fourth, fifth, and sixth graders and had never spent much time with primary grades students. She was frustrated with the neediness and their constant requests for help when looking for books or other materials in the library. Her goals for the following year encompassed helping these younger students become more independent library users. She felt that she had truly done her job when a student could come into the library, use the online catalog to locate a book, take it to the circulation desk and get it checked out without asking for her assistance. Teaching students to find the books they wanted was her defining accomplishment for the school year and she wished to expand it the following year

into more outreach to the teachers so that they were aware of the wealth of resources available in the library media center.

It's kind of sentimental, but really rewarding when they come in, they get on Destiny, they go in, they get their books, they get on Destiny and find another one, they go see Ms. Culpepper and check out and they go out the door! I promise you none of the older kids ask me where anything is anymore. I mean, every now and then they will but for the most part they come in and they get what they need, check out and...it's beautiful.

At the end of the year, Lara had come to the conclusion that the most important role of the LMS was

...just teaching them and showing them how to use the resources so that they can be independent and they're not coming up to Ms. Culpepper saying, can you help me find....you know. And that's something that I'm very proud of because of when I came the kids only checked out from right there – that little section.

Although she knew and acknowledged that much of what the LMS should accomplish can be best achieved in collaboration with the classroom teacher, Lara seemed stuck in her own memories of classroom teaching and she believed that her own recalcitrant attitude as a teacher toward using the media center was probably mirrored in Brookside's teachers' beliefs.

At the end of the school year, Lara's LMS identity included a new appraisal of the skills and characteristics she possessed that would be most beneficial to her success as an LMS: creativity, technology ability, and being forward thinking.

I guess the fact that I'm forward thinking, you know. Just like I said with all this technology some of it I don't know how to use and I don't even know what's out there but I'm not afraid of it so forward thinking and I'm a little creative, the little bit that they didn't suck out of me in the classroom, pacing charts and curriculum maps.

How these characteristics were going to inform her practice had not been thoroughly conceptualized. Lara had held few pre-service beliefs about what skills would be needed for this job – after all, it had sounded pretty easy – but a year had brought about a cognitive shift that resulted in a new appreciation of the importance of the

job. She was identifying the habits and competencies that might assist her in achieving her overarching goal of convincing her colleagues of the LMS's importance. Her arrival at this set of characteristics indicates her belief that the introduction of a new concept of library media to the figured world of Brookside would necessitate creativity, forward thinking, and technological know-how. At the conclusion of her first year as an LMS, Lara felt that her job was important; now she wanted everyone else to believe that as well.

### **Summary**

Lara arrived at her career as a library media specialist as a result of her dissatisfaction with teaching and the observations that she had made of the LMS at the school where she taught. After several years in the classroom, Lara began exploring her options for escape and determined, based on direct observations of and conversations with Paul, her school's LMS, that life as an LMS would be considerably easier. Envisioning herself relaxing with her feet up on her desk in her office, drinking coffee and reading the newspaper between story times, Lara enrolled in a library media technology certification program.

Although she found the classwork in the master's program challenging and enlightening, more than a year elapsed between the completion of her studies and her employment at Brookside Elementary. In that time it seemed that much of the focus of the program – collaboration, technology integration - had faded in Lara's memory. What remained was the overwhelming allure of the model of school librarianship that had existed at her previous school and she was extremely excited about the change in position, if not the change in school settings.

The figured world that Lara stepped into at Brookside Elementary School was somewhat bereft of a concept of the library media program as part of that world.

A full year of having an LMS who had been unwillingly assigned to the school combined with the challenges inherent in educating non-English speaking, refugee children had positioned the LMS as an unnecessary accessory to the educational mission of the school. The principal and teachers alike did not have a clear idea of what Lara could and should be doing for them and their students – and neither did Lara. Lara attempted to gain inspiration from the cohort of new LMSs that had joined the district this year as well as from the larger group of District LMSs who shared ideas through the district listserv, the mentor who had been assigned to her, and me as her contact in the district office. The level of disinterest that the teachers and principal at Brookside displayed toward the library media program, although disheartening to Lara, was not unusual among many of the schools in the District. Lara, however, having paid little attention to where the LMS fit in to either of her other school assignments nor having given much thought to those roles, was taken aback and felt personally slighted by some teachers' refusal to bring their children to the library.

As the school year proceeded Lara found herself working hard at administrative tasks that were surprisingly time-consuming. She felt that her hard work garnered little recognition or respect. Her dismay over how Brookside's figured world had positioned the library program and the role of the LMS as "unimportant" ignited a desire to spread her enthusiasm and convince others of the program's worth. However, Lara, when asked, was unable to clearly explain what made the library important. Her inability to articulate her mission and goals as an LMS meant that she had no concrete ideas upon which to build collaborative relationships with teachers. Lara's frequent expression of a desire for a curriculum map, pacing guide, or other list of student learning objectives for the library reflects the difficulty

many new LMSs have with figuring out what to actually do on a day to day basis. Lara was searching for a guide, mentor, handbook, or programmatic schedule to help her define her role and build her program. Although some curriculum documents were available in the District, they were not explicit enough to provide Lara the type of outline she sought. Her concept of herself as an LMS, although passionately defensive of the importance of the position, remained less than clear as the school year came to a close.

### **Epilogue**

As described in other participant chapters, the District's budgetary crisis at the end of the 2011-12 school year resulted in a reduction in force. One of the positions that was determined to be overstaffed was that of the LMS. The determining factor for the laying off of LMSs was their years of service or date of hire. Lara was, in fact, the most recently hired LMS in the system, having been placed as an LMS several weeks after the school year began. However, because she had been employed as a classroom teacher for nine years prior, she was not among those laid off. Lara, needless to say, was very relieved to learn that she would return to the library media center for the 2012-13 school year.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

*“I was a history major at first and then when I decided to be an English major I said, well, there’s not much difference. I like to read history books, I like to read English books, I’ll be an English major. I like to read and I like to write.” Ian*

*“I was reading in the dark since 5<sup>th</sup> grade and I think it was maybe 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade I was tested and I had a 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. So I’ve always been an avid reader with good vocabulary skills and I just love to read.” Maya*

*“I read a lot of books and I loved to read. And I was kind of like a collector of books so it was like I was a little packrat. I didn’t care if the book was falling apart, I couldn’t throw it away.” Lara*

*“Yeah, my whole life, at least weekly we would go on a family outing - go hang out in the library for a while and get books.” Pam*

**Introduction**

The purpose of this naturalistic case study informed by phenomenological and narrative inquiry was to explore how the figured worlds of K12 public schools shaped novice LMS’s professional identity construction as they transitioned from pre-service to practice and the behaviors that are associated with those identities.

The questions that guided this research were:

1. How do novice library media specialists come to understand themselves while constructing their professional identities in the figured worlds of K12 public schools?
  - a. How does personal history inform the professional identity of novice library media specialists’ professional identity?
  - b. How do novice library media specialists negotiate identity within the figured worlds of public K12 schools?

The previous four chapters presented rich descriptions of four new LMSs and their experiences and evolving professional identity during their first year of

practice. Data was collected during the 2011-12 school year; data collection methods included a series of in-depth interviews, observations, document analysis, and written responses to journal prompts. Using Flores and Day's (2006) findings regarding the key mediating influences on the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of teachers' identities as a guide, I organized each participant's chapter into four sections: 1) personal history and experiences; 2) pre-service experiences and perceptions; 3) the figured worlds of each participants' school setting; and 4) a description of the ways in which the participants negotiated LMS identity within those figured worlds. In this chapter I extend the analysis by looking for commonalities among the participants. For this cross-case comparison, the data was analyzed through a narrower lens with the goal of focusing on themes that emerged across all or a subgroup of all four participants. Their identifying information is included in Table 3 below.

Table 3

*Participant Characteristics*

LMS Name	Age	Gender	Race	Certification Type(s) [Teaching (TC) and/or LMS Certification]	ALA or NCATE Preparation Program	Years in Education
Ian	32	Male	Caucasian	TC/ LMS (provisional)	ALA (MLIS)	9
Pam	29	Female	Caucasian	LMS	NCATE (MLM)	0
Lara	33	Female	African American	TC/LMS	NCATE (MEd)	10
Maya	36	Female	African American	LMS	NCATE (MEd)	8

## Comparative Analysis

### Personal History and Experiences

The first in-depth interview that I conducted with each participant allowed me to explore the biographical and personal history factors that may have contributed to the participants' decision to pursue a career in school librarianship and their perceptions of school LMSs. They each spoke about the types of education they had received; family and friends and how they influenced career choices; and their memories of libraries and librarians, both within and outside of school. The common experiences and perceptions that existed across all or most of the cases and are listed in Table 4 below. The characteristics the participants shared were:

1. Extensive library use during childhood and/or young adulthood.
2. A close family member or friend who works (or worked) in public K12 education.
3. Experience as a classroom teacher.
4. Identifying themselves as readers.

Table 4

#### *Shared Historical Characteristics*

LMS Name	Library User	I am a Reader	Family or Friend in K12 Education	Classroom Teaching Experience
Ian	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pam	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Lara	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Maya	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Interestingly, only Pam reported positive memories of interactions with a school LMS or public librarian; the other participants, by and large, could only confirm the presence of a librarian in their schools. All four participants, however, did share that they were regular, frequent visitors to public libraries when they were young. This common memory and disposition toward library use among the participants goes hand-in-hand with their self-identification as readers. Each of the four participants referred to themselves as “readers.” This propensity to read extensively for pleasure is not a surprising characteristic to find among a group who have chosen to become school librarians, considering that warehousing and circulating books were historically the primary roles associated with the job. All four participants talked about their reading habits as children and how they were encouraged and recognized by adults for being “good readers.” The stories told by all four participants provide evidence of their belief in the strong and enduring connection between books, reading, and school librarianship. This data, as well as other research, (Shannon, 2001, 2008) indicates that the inclination to participate in and encourage leisure reading appears to be a characteristic of individuals who decide to become LMSs. Reading behaviors and beliefs about reading are components of these LMSs professional identities and impact the ways they enact the LMS role.

Ian, Maya and Lara shared the important characteristic of having spent time as classroom teachers. They were anxious to make a career change that would remove them from the classroom and all believed that being an LMS would be significantly easier and less stressful than teaching. Ian summed up their feelings when he said, “I don’t ever really want to go back. Because it’s a burnout. I don’t think anyone can really understand the conditions that the times are likely to lay

upon us. I would not want to be a classroom teacher under the circumstances that are coming” (Ian, Interview #1). Although Pam had not previously taught, she was also seeking a career change; her mother, a former teacher, advised her to look at library media as a career choice.

Ian, Pam, Maya, and Lara approached their graduate programs with a set of shared characteristics that included childhood memories of library visits, a love of reading, and a desire to escape from the classroom. Having reached a point in their lives where they felt the need for a career change, each considered library media an option that would provide them with security, stability, a relatively generous salary, and less stress.

### **Pre-Service Experiences and Perceptions**

As in any profession, pre-service LMSs come to their decision to pursue certification in school library media with existing beliefs about what an LMS is and does. I explored those preconceptions with the participants during our first interview. Asking them to recall what they had thought about the LMS prior to the beginning of their graduate programs provided insight into not only their motivations for entering the profession but the roots of their future LMS identities. Several beliefs were commonly held; those that emerged consistently among the entire group were:

1. LMSs are usually older women who do not interact much with students.
2. LMSs do not work very hard or have to do very much.
3. The primary function of an LMS is selection and maintenance of a collection of books, circulating that collection, and acting as a reader advisor.

When the four novice LMSs in this study were asked what their pre-service understanding of the primary functions of an LMS were, they responded, without hesitation, that it was to check books in and out and to “run the library” (Ian, Interview #1). This commonly held belief about LMS roles accompanied them into their graduate programs.

There are various pathways to becoming a certified LMS in the state in which this study took place and the four participants manifested a cross-section of several of those options. It can be noted that Lara and Maya attended the same university to receive their Master of Education in School Library Media. The diversity of the programs that the participants attended is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5

*Preparation Programs*

LMS Name	Prep Program Accreditation	On-line, Face to Face, or Hybrid	Internship (0, 1, or more schools)
Ian	ALA	Online	No internship
Pam	NCATE	Face to Face	1 school
Lara	NCATE	Hybrid (mostly online)	1 school (her own school)
Maya	NCATE	Hybrid (mostly online)	Multiple schools

Evidence that the three different library media programs attended by the four participants in this study challenged their preexisting beliefs exists for three out of the four candidates. Lara, Maya and Pam all told stories about how their classes and internship experiences introduced LMS roles that varied from their preconceived understandings: teacher, collaborative partner, technology specialist, instructional consultant. Pam's program offered classes that she felt effectively communicated some of the challenges LMSs face in trying to enact the idealized roles set forth by AASL in *Information Power* (AASL & AECT, 1998). "We all had to go out to schools and do an interview and pretty much every single one of us - the person we interviewed said, yeah it would be great if we could collaborate but we don't have time. It was almost the 100% response." (Pam, Interview #1) Ian was the lone participant whose master's program did not challenge preexisting ideas of school librarianship. Because he attended an online, ALA accredited program whose goal it was to prepare librarians to work in public, higher education, or corporate/private libraries and archives, Ian did not receive any school library-related training. He began working as an LMS with the same set of beliefs and understandings that he had carried with him as a classroom teacher.

Required internships were part of the school library media certification programs that Pam, Lara, and Maya attended. Unfortunately, these internships provided the participants with few opportunities to see effective collaborative planning and teaching, creative curriculum and program development, or innovative use of technology tools.

I didn't see much collaboration at all. Pretty much all the lessons were like dictionary skills. The second graders were stuck on guide words for a while. That took them a couple of weeks of lessons to really get good at that. There were a few classes that came in to do their Georgia animal research, but it

was really just filling out whatever the teacher had given them. I didn't see her work with teachers at all. (Pam, Interview #1)

They did, however, allow them to spend time in a library media center and have some hands on experience with its day to day operations.

The nascent identities that Ian, Pam, Maya and Lara had begun to construct as they embarked on their careers were products of the combination of their biographical histories, their master's programs, and their internship experiences. As the four novices began their LMS careers, the figured worlds of their school assignments afforded each with unique contexts within which they began to negotiate their professional identities.

### **Figured Worlds – Context, Discourse, Culture**

Holland et al. (1998) introduced the concept of the figured world as “a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (p. 52). For example, in the figured world of 21<sup>st</sup> Century public K12 educational institutions, teachers who can prepare students to succeed on standardized tests, those students who do well on the tests, and principals who can manage those teachers while keeping student absences and behavior incidents at a minimum are valued and identified as successful.

Figured worlds, as a realm of interpretation, create a context of meaning and “provide the loci in which people fashion senses of self—that is, develop identities” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 60). Another way to describe this fashioning of self is that figured worlds, as a context of meaning, enables individuals to ‘figure out’ who they are within this context. This figuring is a function of each person's subjective experience, or personal history (Holland & Lave, 2001), and interactions with other participants who populate these worlds (Holland et al., 1998). (as cited in Robinson, 2007, p. 193)

Being hired as an LMS provided Ian, Pam, Maya, and Lara invitations to join the figured worlds of their schools. Ian, Pam, and Maya became part of a team of two

LMSs while Lara joined a full time clerk as the sole LMS at her school. The demographics of their school assignments are shown below in Table 6.

Table 6

*School Demographics*

School Site	Population	Ethnicity	Free or Reduced Lunch	AYP Status
Georgia Washington High School ( <b>Ian</b> )	1,637	97% Black 3% Other	67%	Needs Improvement (NI)
Mountaintop Elementary ( <b>Pam</b> )	1,085	99% Black 1% Other	79%	Did not meet AYP – Not in NI
Brookside Elementary ( <b>Lara</b> )	937	53% Black 39% Asian 8% Other	94%	Needs Improvement
Winfrey Theme Elementary ( <b>Maya</b> )	918	99% Black 1% Other	49%	Met AYP

These demographics are shared by a large portion of the schools in the HCSD; the socioeconomic conditions and low academic achievement (based on test scores) of the school populations are vital keys to understanding the figured worlds that Ian, Pam, Maya, and Lara participated in during the 2011-12 school year.

Unbeknownst to the educators in the HCSD, the 2011-12 school year would be the last that would measure school performance using the No Child Left Behind Act's metric of AYP. Adequate Yearly Progress is determined based on a number of factors, the most weighty of which is student performance on state standardized tests. The primary focus of the administrators in the schools in this study, according to the LMSs, was to make AYP; they were feeling pressured to find ways to produce a change in student test performance. This pressure was shifted down to the teaching staff, resulting in anxiety and hyper-awareness of the need to teach to the test in order to raise scores. Each of the participant LMSs stated that the teachers in their schools felt discouraged and pessimistic about their ability to raise students' performance to the goals set by the state and District. Unfortunately, a focus on standardized testing does not lend itself to teaching that incorporates more authentic, problem-based learning tasks and performance-based assessments – the types of teaching and learning which library media specialists are trained to facilitate. Based on observations and supported by the participants' descriptions of the types of lesson planning and teaching taking place, it appeared that teachers at all four schools had little incentive to provide students learning experiences that introduced 21<sup>st</sup> Century information technologies or skills; the focus was on boosting reading and math scores through drill and practice. Teachers' lack of awareness and understanding of the role that the LMS can play in instructional design and delivery as well as the benefits of collaborative planning resulted in information literacy

skills frequently being taught in isolation. Maya's "lessons," Pam's one-time "research skills" class for 5<sup>th</sup> graders, and Ian's 9<sup>th</sup> grade orientation are examples of this type of instruction. The low level of teacher expectations and lack of collaboration was a common characteristic of the figured worlds at all four participants' schools.

The expectations of the principals at each of these schools were similarly low. All four expressed to the participants their desire to see more activity in their library media centers. Only two of the principals granted me brief interviews; during these conversations, the principals talked about their wish for lots of activity in the library and used the terms "hub" and "center" of learning. They were unable, however, to provide a more specific description of their vision or goals and all four LMSs felt that, as long as there were no problems in the library that required the principal's attention, their performance would be deemed satisfactory. The four participants all noted that their principals rarely "darkened the door" (Ian, Interview #3) of the library media center and none believed that the principal ever performed a formal observation, although two are required annually. This lack of interest in and understanding of the role(s) of the LMS contributed to the undervaluing of the potential instructional impact of the library media program by all. Because of the lack of a clear and consistent agreement about the role of the LMS, novices are frequently caught off guard by the myriad, conflicting expectations that the members of their figured worlds hold regarding the position. (Church, 2007; DeGroff, et al., 1997; O'Neal, 2004) Responding to such differing expectations made identity development challenging for the novice LMSs in this study.

Three of the schools' figured worlds included a veteran LMS. Ian, Pam, and Maya found themselves engaged in identity development alongside an experienced

co-LMS with a more established identity. Challenging the LMS identity that had been negotiated by a fellow LMS proved daunting. Pam's description of her frustration at the midpoint in the year was representative:

I guess partly I don't want to seem like I'm too pushy. But by the end of the semester I was frustrated for several weeks. I was kind of stuck in the middle trying to figure out how I start changing things. I was just kind of frustrated for a while. But then finally I just decided – well, I just need to just start doing it and see how it works out.

Having a co-LMS proved to be a significantly influential characteristic of the figured worlds of Ian, Pam and Mara.

The similarities of the figured worlds that each participant experienced were demographic, cultural, and uniquely impacted by the staffing of the LMC. In the next section I will summarize the ways in which the four novice LMSs began to “figure out” who they were within their figured worlds and the ways in which the factors discussed above impacted their LMS identities.

### **Identity**

The four novice LMSs who participated in this study embarked on their LMS careers with some ideas about what an LMS is and does and what they would do when they began working as LMSs. The personal historical, biographical, and educational influences detailed in their individual chapters, such as influential family members or self-identification as a reader, combined and provided each candidate with their unique understanding of themselves as new LMSs. Identities, however, are not fixed or static but are, as Holland et al. (1998) state, “a composite one of slow, sometimes erratic, but continuous change. History-in-person collides with combinations of circumstances...” (p. 46) and the behaviors and actions that arise from that collision become available to bring about change in oneself, others, or even the figured world. The figured worlds that Ian, Pam, Maya and Lara joined

offered each an LMS identity that they variously challenged, accepted, and negotiated throughout their first year.

At the beginning of the school year, each of the four participants' descriptions of the typical LMS closely mimicked the stereotype portrayed for decades in media of all types: an older white woman who wears glasses, is not particularly congenial, prefers quiet and checks out books. Descriptions of the LMSs they had encountered in their school libraries, both as students and teachers, also fit the stereotype. Although this stereotype certainly did not fit Pam, Ian, Maya and Lara – two white, two black, one male, all in their 20s and 30s – they identified themselves as the new generation of library media specialists. None mentioned that they felt like they were too young or too black or too loud. However, the other stereotyped characteristic, that of the book circulator, was one that they had all accepted and which formed the basis of their new LMS identities. The figured worlds of each of the participants did not challenge this “reading” identity; in fact, the book and reading-centered LMS identity was the one most readily accepted by the teachers, students, and staff at their schools.

As the school year progressed, however, the novice's satisfaction with that narrowly defined role began to wane. Each began to question, albeit some more strongly than others, whether they were “doing the right job” (Coatney, 2007). Through their social interactions with students, faculty and staff, administrators, fellow LMSs, district level personnel, parents and community members, they began to figure who they were. Over the course of the year, their identities were shaped by the figured worlds in which they held the library media specialist position. The factors or relationships that had the strongest influence on their emerging identities were:

1. The presence of a co-LMS.
2. Interactions with teachers and students.
3. Pre-existing beliefs about library media specialists.

The single element of the figured worlds of the four schools that had the most dramatic impact on the participants' identity development was their pairing with another LMS. When hired at their respective schools, Ian, Pam and Maya each joined an LMS who had been working at their schools for several years as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

*Co-Library Media Specialists*

Participant LMS Name	School	Partner LMS	Years Partner LMS at school
Ian	<i>George Washington HS</i>	Dr. A	11
Pam	Mountaintop ES	Simone	3
Maya	Winfrey Theme ES	Brandy	2
Lara	Brookside ES	N/A	N/A

For many years it was common practice in public K12 schools to have multiple LMSs assigned to a library based on the number of students enrolled. As recently as ten years ago, the HCSD utilized a staffing formula that assigned two LMSs to every middle school and high school, no matter the enrollment, and some elementary schools based on size. During the year of this study (2011-2012) second LMSs were placed at schools with large student populations; Ian, Pam, and Maya were three of those LMSs. The LMSs with whom they were partnered had all had at least two years in which to negotiate their own LMS identities within the figured worlds of their schools. Identities being forever in transition, these negotiations were ongoing but, in some cases, less fluid than others.

Ian joined Dr. A who had been at GWHS since the school opened eleven years prior. Dr. A's LMS identity was one that emphasized tight control over the space and its resources and little interaction with teachers and students in an instructional capacity. His focus on authority, policies, and rules limited the ways that the other members of GWHS's world were able to interact with the media center and the objects and people inside of it. The LMS identity that Ian began to create was a counterpoint to Dr. A's. As students, teachers, and the principal confided in Ian about their dissatisfaction and dislike of Dr. A, Ian began to imagine that success in his new position would require his being significantly different than his co-LMS. Being considered easier to get along with, less authoritarian, more cooperative, and simply nicer became Ian's indicators of success and were the foundation of the LMS identity he was forming at GWHS. He said, "I have made a major improvement just by not being him. By not being Dr. A they do not avoid the library quite as much." Through his relationships with students and teachers, Ian began to introduce them to a different idea of what an LMS was; simultaneously, his understanding of

himself as a school LMS expanded beyond his initial book-oriented and classroom-escape artist librarian identity. By the end of the year Ian was feeling more compelled to not only be nicer than Dr. A but to be more effective.

Pam also joined an LMS whose identity was different than the idealized one she had formed during pre-service. She, like Ian, envisioned more collaboration with teachers with the goal of designing activities for students that would allow them to develop 21<sup>st</sup> Century information literacy and technology skills. Pam felt conflicted throughout most of the school year over her desire to make changes to the way the other members of Mountaintop Elementary's figured world viewed the LMS. Because her own LMS identity was tenuous, it did not support her desire to change things or to challenge the already established program. Her frustration grew as the year progressed and she channeled that frustration into planning for the following year; she was determined to begin the next year with a plan for more collaboration with teachers and working with whole classes. Pam's evolving LMS identity was influenced by other LMSs with whom she networked in the District as well as blogs and professional journals she read and conferences and meetings she attended. However, when describing the type of library media specialist she wished to be, Pam always referred to Dr. White and the graduate program she had attended. The preparation program's impact on Pam's identity did not dissipate in the face of the figured world of Mountaintop Elementary. However, Pam's hesitation to cause conflict or incite bad feelings allowed her partner, Simone, to maintain a relative position of power during Pam's first year. As Pam said,

I actually got kind of frustrated in the middle of this semester about the way I wish I could be doing things but no one else was really being open to it or it seemed like I would have to fight really hard or seem like a jerk kind of to change things.

Whether Pam would have tried to change things during her second year is a question that remains unanswered since she lost her job due to a reduction in force.

Maya's reaction to her placement with a partner LMS was very different than Pam's. Brandy, the LMS with whom Maya worked at Winfrey Theme Elementary, had been at that school for only two years when Maya arrived. Brandy took it upon herself to try and facilitate an introduction to the profession that would aid Maya if she ended up in a library media center alone. Brandy presented herself as the expert and Maya fully accepted her guidance. Maya willingly conformed to the LMS identity offered at Winfrey - the one that Brandy had been developing over the past two years. It involved acquiescence to the principal's fixed schedule, allowing the reading specialist to drive all reading celebrations and reading themed programs, doing story time and book checkout for all lower grade students each time they visited the library, and designing and teaching information literacy skills lessons in isolation from classroom content. The one role that Maya rebelled against was that of the Accelerated Reader reading policewoman; as mentioned earlier, she felt strongly that students should be allowed to check out books that they found interesting, whether they were on their reading level or not. There is evidence that Maya's firm adherence to her personal beliefs on this issue had begun to affect Brandy, as Maya described how she and Brandy had both begun to argue with teachers about what books students could check out from the library. The LMS identity that Maya had brought with her to Winfrey had mostly developed as a result of her friendship with an LMS and her observations of LMSs in her previous workplaces; Maya was very willing to allow Brandy to introduce her to a different idea of school librarianship, particularly in light of the principal's obvious approval of and satisfaction with Brandy's performance.

The final participant in the group, Lara, was the only one of the four who went to work in a library where she was the sole LMS. Although Lara did not have a partner with whom she had to negotiate position and identity, she did enter a figured world where the LMS and the library's influence had been diminished by the previous LMS's lack of engagement with that world. Because the previous LMS had spent most of her one year at Brookside looking for an escape, many of the teachers in the building seemed hesitant to embrace the new LMS and had extremely low expectations for what the media center and specialist could offer them and their students. Lara reacted strongly to this rejection and stated repeatedly that she was "taking it personal." Rather than engaging in dialogue that could have created opportunities for new understandings and relationships to grow, she struggled to understand why the teachers at her school did not bring their students to the library and grew angry. Lara failed to see the irony of her situation. She admitted that as a classroom teacher she had not used the library or collaborated with the LMS. She also admitted that her motivation for entering the profession was her desire to escape from the classroom and get to "relax" like the LMS at her former school. However, when she did finally land a position as an LMS she became irate, "Cuz around here I get the feeling that it's not important. Ummm...it's just not important." (Lara, Interview #3). I believe that some of Lara's insistence on the importance of the library program was a result of the perceived difficulty of her master's degree program and her feeling of accomplishment when she achieved the position of LMS. Anything that difficult to achieve, she seemed to say, had to be important. She had, in the end, come to the conclusion that it would be impossible to have any impact on students if she didn't find a way to convince the staff of the library's importance. Her search for a way to communicate her enthusiasm for the

resources available in her library continued on to the end of the school year. She is the only one of the four participants who returned to her library media center to work a second year.

### **Summary**

Common themes arose among the four participants around their biographical and historical stories, their motivations for entering the profession of school library media, the figured worlds to which they were invited to begin their careers, and the ways they negotiated their LMS identities within those figured worlds. Personal history informed the LMS identity that each participant had already donned when they crossed the threshold of their library media center on their first day of work. They were primarily influenced by library media specialists with whom they had previously worked, friends and family members who were educators, and a discourse around librarianship that ties reading and books with the profession. The graduate programs that the participants attended served to mediate the fledgling identities of some of the participants by introducing an expanded vision of the purpose of the LMS in the K12 school setting. However, the figured worlds of each participants' school offered LMS identities that were not in accord with the idealized LMS presented in graduate programs. The presence of a second LMS in the media center presented the most powerful influence upon the novice LMSs. The LMS identities that Pam, Ian, Maya, and Lara had constructed at the end of their first year of practice were complex creations that reflected the unique combination of each participant's history, pre-service preparation, and the position they had negotiated in their school's figured world.

## CHAPTER NINE

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

*The changes in Miss Lotty's new kid-friendly library were hard to miss. Not surprisingly, the kids at Sunrise Elementary School began to **love** library day.*

*Miss Lotty's transformation, however, was not complete...*

*But then, every librarian needs to be a little bit of a dragon – or else:*

*WHO WOULD GUARD THE BOOKS?*

Carmen Agra Deedy

*The Library Dragon, pp. 26-28*

*If school librarians can't prove they make a difference,  
they may cease to exist.*

Ross Todd

*The Evidence Based Manifesto (2008)*

This study sought to shed light on the ways novice library media specialists come to understand themselves while constructing their professional identities in the figured worlds of K12 public schools. The overarching question that the research sought to answer was:

1. How do novice library media specialists describe their professional identities?

Sub-questions explored were:

- a. How does personal history inform the professional identity of novice library media specialists?
- b. How do novice library media specialists negotiate identity within the figured worlds of public K12 schools?

Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 were rich descriptions of each of the four participants' personal histories, pre-service experiences, and first year on the job. In Chapter 8, the results of a comparative analysis of the participants' stories were provided concluding with a summary of the common themes that emerged across all four cases. This chapter will discuss the findings in more detail and in relation to how

they answer the research questions. Finally, conclusions and recommendations for further research will close the chapter.

### **How do Novice Library Media Specialists Describe Their Professional Identity?**

The participants in this study began their first year of practice with understandings of themselves as LMSs as unique as their backgrounds and training. Although they shared some common characteristics, described in Chapter 8, each answered differently when, during the first interview, they were asked what they thought it meant to be a school LMS. Throughout the course of this research, that question was posed, formally and informally, in interviews, writing prompts, conversations, and observations. At the end of the year, the participants had begun to construct identities that reflected the complex interaction of their biographical histories, pre-service training, and the figured worlds in which they worked. The participants in this study described their emerging professional LMS identity in the following ways:

- 1. In opposition or acquiescence to the LMS identity offered or recognized in their figured world, depending upon the dominant discourse.**

All four participants found themselves, in varying degrees, dissatisfied with the identities proffered by the figured worlds of their schools. These identities, in Pam's and Ian's cases, were personified by the LMS partners with whom they worked while in Lara's case the identity recognized and offered by the teachers and administrators at Brookrun was a composite of their previous experiences with other LMSs, including Lara's most recent predecessor. Although Pam, Ian, and Lara vocalized their dissatisfaction with what they felt were the imperfect, deficient models of LMS practice and identity being made available to them, they showed little agency or autonomy in the ways they approached their perceived problem or

identity construction. Despite Pam's declarations of frustration and claims that she was going to "just start doing it and see how it works out," she actually seemed to be waiting until the following school year to see if she would be relocated to a school library where she would be working solo. She believed she would then be able to implement a library media program that fit her own ideals more closely than her partner's. Each of these three cited their newness as a reason for their reticence to attempt to make changes in the cultures that existed around the library media specialist position at their schools. Ian quickly came to the conclusion that to be successful in his setting he simply needed to not emulate his partner, Dr. A. Lara was a study in contraction. Believing that the main functions of the LMS were to check books in and out read stories, she found that other teachers' similar beliefs enraged her. The fact that many teachers did not bring their students to the library media center (just as she had not when she was a teacher) was insulting to her. She continued to behave as she felt the teachers wanted her to – letting them drop off students for story time with no pre-planning or collaboration, but complained bitterly about who those who came and those who stayed away.

All four participants were observably and vocally committed to conforming to their principal's expectations and felt that doing what the principal asked would lead to "successful" execution of their LMS responsibilities, despite recognition that these principals' expectations did not align with AASL standards or best practices as presented in the professional literature. Additionally, Ian's and Pam's identities were influenced by their desire to avoid open conflict with their co-LMSs. As Pam said, "...it seemed like I would have to fight really hard or seem like a jerk kind of to change things."

Maya, on the other hand, acquiesced to her partner's strong role identity and seemed satisfied with following Brandy's lead in most areas of enacting school librarianship. Maya's lack of confidence and loosely formed ideas regarding the LMS role allowed her to feel comfortable with her partner's leadership and tutelage. In her limited experience, Maya felt that the library media program Brandy had developed was superior to those she'd observed elsewhere and was more than willing to let Brandy tell her how to do the job.

The identities offered to the four novices, which were in major part constructions of LMS behavior as created by partner LMSs, were the dominant factors in the ways in which the novice library media specialists described their own LMS identity. Ian, perhaps, put it most succinctly, when he stated emphatically, "I am not him."

**2. In accordance with self-identification as a reading champion, supporter, expert.**

It seems inevitable that when a new librarian of any type, school or otherwise, begins to talk about who they are within their world of "librarianship," they will talk about books and reading. This assumption held true with the participants in this study; much of the discourse around what they did and their primary roles within their figured worlds involved talk of books and reading. Ian felt that his literary predilections situated him in a position superior to that of his partner, Dr. A. Maya felt that she had unique insight into how pushing young, African-American boys into reading books that had little or no cultural relevance to them could inhibit not only their current interest in reading but their future academic pursuits. Pam believed that the culture of her school actually devalued reading and wondered about ways to influence the learning community's

(particularly parents') attitudes toward reading. She said, "I wish reading, in general, was encouraged more. I think that would help a lot of our students in so many ways. They're doing poorly in a lot of subjects just because many of them really can't read." Related to their identifying as reading champions was the following identity/stance that several (Ian, Pam, Maya) took.

**3. As a staff-member who offers unique understanding and support to individual students and teachers.**

Ian, Pam and Maya felt that the position of library media specialist had afforded them an opportunity to establish themselves as members of the figured world that could establish unique relationships with students and staff. Without the responsibility of giving grades or occupying a classroom space with a group of students all day long, the participants felt that they could act as a sounding board for both staff and students on a variety of topics. As Pam stated,

I think one of the things - particularly in this school - I most accomplished was getting to know the kids and being someone who actually listens to them and thinks their ideas are cool. But, that's just because I think a lot of these kids don't get that at home. Not necessarily because it's the librarian's job. It just happens to be something that I really enjoy and it also helps get them interested in books, too, which is good. We can be friends kind of and talk about books and I actually do want to know what they thought about the book and stuff like that. But I guess in general, helping - maybe they're related at least - helping the kids know how to...not only know how to find information but realize that they can.

Lara was the only participant who did not tell a story that involved her getting to know students or teachers in ways that she felt put her in a position that privileged her to understand or know them in a manner that others in their figured world did not.

#### 4. As having less than optimal impact on student learning.

The narratives created by each of the participants in this study provide insight into the different understandings that novice LMSs have of what they should be doing – what the LMS’s roles are – in their schools. They each, at some time, lamented that they were not sure what they should be doing. However, by necessity, they attempted to “do something.” That something may have recreated what they had seen before (Lara, Maya); it may have followed the lead of administrator and teacher expectations (Maya, Pam, Ian); or it may have bent to a co-LMSs strong influence (Ian, Pam, Maya). Despite the diverse approaches to enacting the LMS role, all four participants expressed a feeling of inefficacy as LMSs. The participants’ lack of clarity regarding the most important functions or roles of the LMS made it difficult for them to articulate the ways in which they felt they were being ineffective. Pam, the participant with the most clearly elucidated framework for LMS practice, frequently stated that she and her co-LMS were not providing enough direct instruction in information literacy or research skills to the students at their school. She lamented the students’ skills deficits in finding information, basic literacy, and ability to think critically. Ian similarly expressed feelings of frustration over his perceived lack of impact on student learning. He stated, “Am I teaching when students are in the media center? Sometimes. Often, the teachers appear quite content to have us in the background, for better or worse. I could do a lot more.” Teacher resistance to collaboration and the difficulty of changing what were perceived to be unsatisfactory practices of co-LMSs were the most frequently cited barriers to more impactful actions.

The descriptions of LMS identity offered by the four participants often revealed frustration that arises when expectations and reality collide. As much of

the teacher identity research has revealed (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003; Flores & Day, 2006; Lortie, 1975), an almost universal experience of the novice educator is the difficulty inherent in the “sudden and sometimes dramatic transition from student to teacher. Many researchers have emphasized the reality shock or abruptness which confronts new teachers as they take on the full responsibility of their roles as schoolteachers” (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 219). Flores and Day labeled the process by which new teachers negotiate this transition as deconstruction and reconstruction of their identities. Their findings indicated that the effects of the contexts within which new teachers practiced had a stronger impact upon their reconstructed teacher identities than their pre-service training and that their behavior conformed to the contextual pressures they encountered. The reshaping of identity observed in the four novice LMSs in this study reflected a similar strong influence of the contexts within which they practiced and a similarly weak influence of the pre-service preparation program.

#### **How does personal history inform novice LMSs professional identity?**

The teacher identity model (see Figure 2) developed by Flores and Day (2006) provided a framework for my study and shaped the development of the research questions. As mentioned previously, their research findings indicated a powerful relationship between teachers’ personal histories and the contextual influences of the workplace on the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of professional identity.

Figure 2

Key mediating Influences on the Formation of Teacher Identity

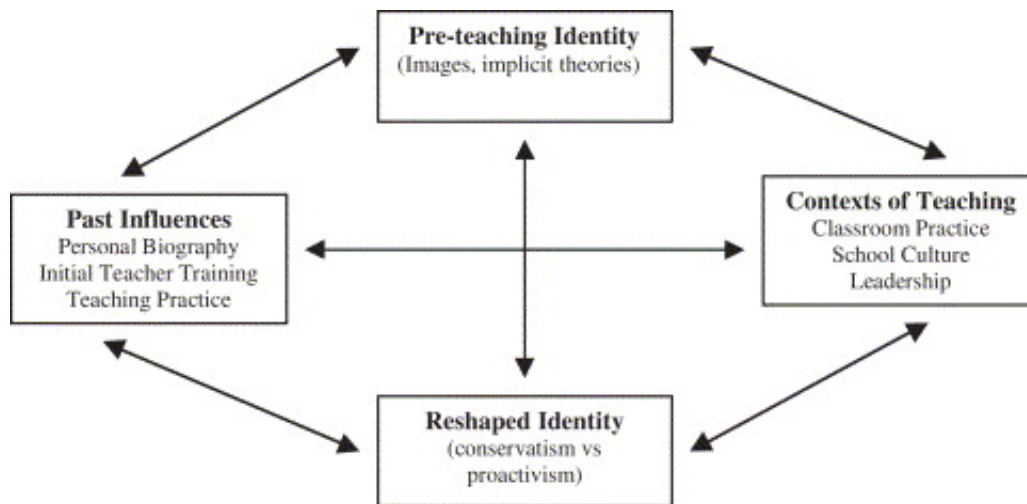


Figure 2. Reprinted from “Contexts which shape and reshape new teachers’ identities: A multi-perspective study,” by Flores, M. A. and Day, C., 2006, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22, p. 230. Reprinted with permission.

For the purposes of this study, I utilized the three main identity influences identified by Flores and Day as the framework for my research questions and data collection. In the participants’ individual chapters, the presentation of the emergent themes reflected Flores and Day’s model as they related to: 1) personal biography and history; 2) pre-service experiences and perceptions; and 3) context of practice (figured worlds).

Flores and Day’s study defined personal biography as the experiences of an individual during the period of time prior to entering teacher training; my research utilized a similar definition. However, their findings pointed to the teachers’

experiences in **childhood** as pupils as being most influential on their career choices, classroom practices, and how they viewed themselves as teachers. They equated this with Lortie's (1975) 'apprenticeship of observation,' claiming that new teachers' observations of teachers during their own K-12 educations played an important role in the way they thought of themselves and acted as teachers. However, the experiences of novice LMSs differ from those of new teachers; the amount of time a student spends observing an LMS during their years in grades Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> is significantly less than that spent observing classroom teachers. Although the data I collected indicated that some lasting impressions are carried forward from school observations, the results of this research indicate that the observations made in **adulthood** – either of LMSs in the school where a participant worked as a teacher or of family or friends who worked in the field – had an even stronger influence on the ways in which the participants began to construct their professional identities. Because the pre-service LMSs in this study entered library media training with preconceived notions of what an LMS is and does that were based largely on observations made during their years employed in education or of close friends or family, I concluded that the concept of 'apprenticeships of observation' should not only include childhood observations but those made during adult years as well.

The results of this study indicated that the following historical characteristics and experiences strongly informed the participants' novice LMS identities:

1. Perceptions of themselves as readers and library-related experiences, including library use, during childhood.
2. Influences of family members or close friends who are educators.

3. Observations of LMSs who worked in the schools in which they taught or worked in support positions.

The set of assumptions that the participants generated from these experiences included the belief that an LMS career was one that involved books and reading; entailed lower levels of responsibility and stress than classroom teaching; and provided stability and an adequate income coupled with generous holidays. These beliefs brought the four participants to the doorstep of master's programs that offered preparation for careers as librarians. Pam, Mara, and Lara attended programs that specifically led to school library media certification; Ian attended a master of library information science program that did not have school library media certification as its end result.

In Flores and Day's model of teacher identity (Figure 2 above), the box labeled "Past Influences" includes not only personal biography but initial teacher training and teaching practice, representing the theoretical proposition that biography coupled with teacher training are the building blocks of pre-service teacher identity. Following this proposition, my research questioned the role that the LMS preparation programs attended played in their identity construction. The results of this study were mostly consistent with those of Flores and Day, who found that pre-service training had a "relatively weak impact upon the way in which new teachers approached teaching and viewed themselves as teachers" (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 224). However, their participants clearly described their feelings of having been inadequately prepared. Additionally, those new teachers experienced both internal and external conflict over the differences between the "pedagogical theories" learned at university (which emphasized issues such as constructivism and

individualization) and the management of the complex and demanding reality of the classroom” (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 224). In contrast, of the four novice LMSs in my study, only Pam regularly referred to her training program or professors from that program as she described her efforts to negotiate her professional identity. The preparation programs of the other participants (delivered all or mostly online) seemed to have had little impact on their beliefs about what the LMS job entailed or on their identities as future media specialists. It appears that the strong mentor-like relationship that Dr. White built with Pam in the face-to-face classes Pam took in her program served as the foundation for Pam’s initial LMS identity. Additionally, Dr. White’s instructional methods included the opportunity for students to observe and interact with experts in the field as well as reflect on their own experiences throughout their master’s program and internship. The strength of Pam’s association with the type of LMS identity put forth by her program, supported by research and grounded in professional standards, is evidence of the benefit of face-to-face instruction and the design of LMS education that includes authentic learning experiences that incorporate reflection. The preparation programs of Ian, Lara and Maya seemed to have had very little direct impact on their practice once they began to work as LMSs; they rarely reflected on their training or called on those experiences for guidance. The effects of the school library internships completed by three (Pam, Maya, Lara) of the participants seem to have also had weak effects upon their practice or identity construction in the workplace. The participants reported that several of the supervising school librarians at their internship sites had modeled practices that the participants identified as less than pedagogically sound or best practices. Pam and Lara, in particular, noted that they were unimpressed with the library media programs or disagreed with practices of two of the

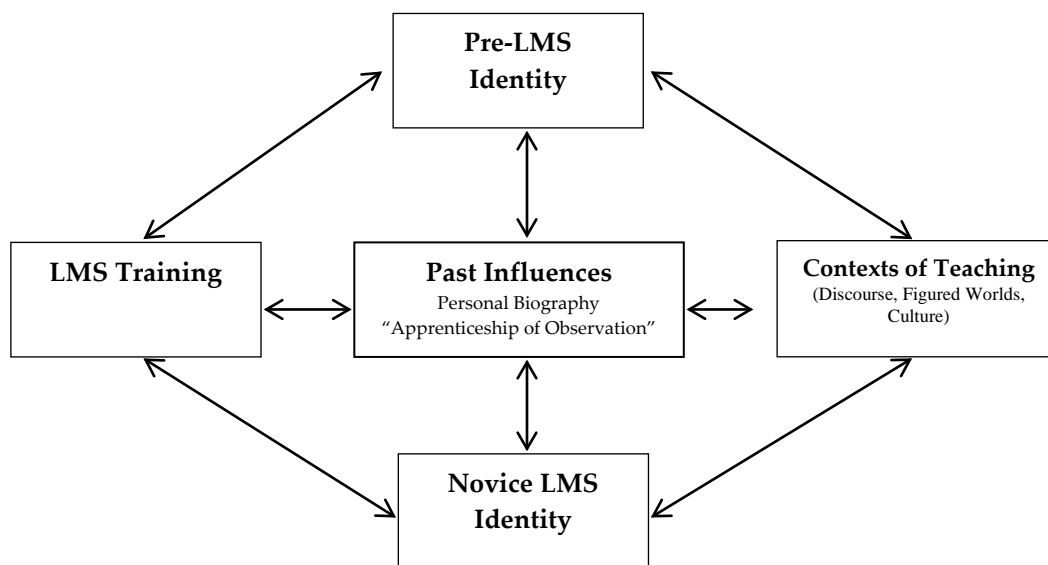
supervising LMSs with which they had interned. Pam's point of reference in her assessment of her supervisor was her preparation program while Maya held up her LMS friend as the ideal model. The rejection of the behaviors of the supervising LMSs during the participants' 'apprenticeship of observation,' demonstrates these participants' willingness and ability to challenge cultural conceptions of what an LMS should do and their awareness of the need to make decisions about their practice rather than to rely on imitation of previously observed behaviors. However, upon entering the field, contextual factors came to bear and some of those previously observed practices were incorporated by Lara and Maya, replicating the observations made by Lortie in the early 1970s. Lortie stated that "reports on practice teaching frequently point out that its effectiveness depends in large part on the skill, involvement, and conscientiousness of the supervising teacher" (1975, p. 59). In the same way that the 'apprenticeship of observation' leads to a "tendency for novice teachers, once they have entered the profession, to revert to their default model," (Borg, 2004, p. 275) these novice LMSs often reverted to the models to which they had been exposed during pre-service. The inability of LMS preparation programs to mediate the perceptions of pre-service LMSs is evidenced by the participants' continued allegiance to a traditional understanding of the functions of the LMS recorded in early interviews and observations.

As I reflected upon what appeared to be the continuing influence of the LMS's 'apprenticeship of observation' on their identity performance and role choices, I made a minor modification to Flores and Day's identity construction/deconstruction/reconstruction model by placing past influences in the central position that my data indicated it inhabited. The participants in this study did not completely relinquish their pre-service LMS identities throughout their first

year of practice. In fact, they often fell back on those identities in an effort to find roles to enact that felt consistent with their preconceived notions of what an LMS is and does. The revised model below depicts this observation and serves to illustrate how the results of this study, although aligned with Flores and Day's findings, result in a modified model that reflects the differences in the experiences of teachers and library media specialists.

*Figure 3*

Key mediating Influences on the Formation of Teacher Identity - Author Modified



**Figure 3.** Author modified from Flores & Day (2006) showing identity development process for novice library media specialists in this study.

**How do novice library media specialists negotiate identity within the figured worlds of public K12 schools?**

Flores and Day's study found that, although there was a strong relationship between personal biography and teacher identity, in most cases it was mediated by context (2006) which comprises classroom practice, school culture, and leadership. Although teachers' identities seemed firmly entrenched upon entering their first teaching position, the influence of the workplace "played a key role in (re)shaping teachers' understanding of teaching, in facilitating or hindering their professional learning and development, and in (re) constructing their professional identity" (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 230).

Holland et al.'s concept of figured worlds was used to frame this study's exploration of the ways in which context mediated professional identity in the participants' first year of practice. Urrieta (2007) explains that

Figured worlds is one of the four contexts that Holland et al. suggest are sites where identities are produced. People "figure" who they are through the activities and in relation to the social types that populate these figured worlds and in social relationships with the people who perform these worlds. People develop new identities in figured worlds. (p. 108).

Figured worlds are cultural phenomena that function as contexts of meaning in which people's positions matter. People are sorted within these worlds and learn to relate to each other in different ways depending upon their position within the social structures of the world. Upon their hiring as library media specialists, the participants in this study entered the figured worlds of the schools where they would begin their professional practice. The other members of these worlds were the teachers, students, administrators, staff, parents, and other community members with whom they would interact. Holland et al. state that these interactions become almost like "roles" (as cited in Urrieta, 2007, p. 109) that do not remain fixed but are

dependent for their continuity on work and agreement with others. The figured worlds joined by Ian, Pam, Maya and Lara offered the novices various permutations of the library media specialist role. Although the four participants struggled and expressed to me their internal dissatisfaction with the LMS identities available in their worlds, during this first year of practice they mostly conformed to:

1. The identities constructed by a second or prior LMS.
2. Teacher expectations of what the library media specialist is and does.
3. The principal's expectations in an attempt to minimize conflict and appease stakeholders.

I will elaborate on each of these contextual factors below.

**1. The identities constructed by a second or prior LMS.**

In several of the figured worlds in this study, a historically created understanding of the person called LMS and embodied as a second, or co-, library media specialist had a profound impact on the ways in which the new LMSs figured themselves professionally. In some cases (Ian), they railed against the image of LMS that was already accepted and in practice in their school while others (Maya, Pam) acquiesced to the expectations of the other members of the group in order to maintain peace and minimize disruption. In the cases studied, the presence of another LMS was the most impactful aspect of the figured worlds on the identity construction of the participants. In the one case where the LMS worked alone, the school's culture and practices around the LMS role had been, in many ways, shaped by the preceding LMS. Whether the novices found themselves feeling constrained or rebellious (Ian, Pam, Lara) or comforted and grateful (Maya) by their partner's or predecessor's presence and model, during this first year they inevitably conformed to the prevailing practices set by the "other" LMS. Plans were being made by Pam, Ian,

and Lara regarding ways in which they might try to introduce change during the following year; they envisioned feeling more confident during their second year and using that confidence to push their personal LMS identities closer to the surface.

## **2. Teacher expectations of what the library media is and does.**

Previous research has documented the incongruity between what teachers think LMSs are and do and the professional roles described by AASL, pre-service training, and the professional literature (Buzzeo, 2007; DeGroff, et al., 1997; Mardis, 2007b; McCracken, 2001; Moreillon, 2008; Russell, 2000). Ian, a former classroom teacher, clearly exemplified many teachers' beliefs about LMSs when he stated:

...in some ways if you really want to when you get to be a media specialist...I don't know if it will continue like this but...if you have reached a certain point in life, you don't have to do anything essentially. You can pretty much just hang out in that media center, depending on the school.

And later,

[The media specialist is] a unique position in education because they're not teachers. The teachers generally in high school are very independent. They really don't know what to make of the media specialist. I didn't even want to collaborate with the media specialist.

All four participants expressed frustration with teachers' unwillingness to collaborate with them; Pam and Maya, in particular, were surprised at the teachers' misunderstanding of how to utilize the LMS and the media center. Maya felt that the teachers just wanted to drop their children off for a "lesson" of the LMS's design while Pam struggled to get teachers to think of the media center as something other than just a place to check out a book. Although the four novice media specialists had all been introduced to the idea of collaborative teaching practices prior to their employment, only Pam seemed prepared with examples of what this practice should look like as well as an awareness of the practical difficulties often faced by LMSs as

they attempt to establish themselves as collaborative partners with teachers. Pam stated,

I definitely thought there would be more whole class kind of instruction. But I did know from some of the interviews we had to do during school when we had to go out and talk to people that were working was also that it could be frustrating and that you have a hard time getting teachers to collaborate with you so actually I was sort of prepared for some of that.

The participants felt pressured to conform to the teachers' expectations of what an LMS is and succumbed in an effort to minimize conflict – between themselves and the teachers (Ian, Maya, Pam, Lara) and themselves and their partners (Maya, Pam, Ian).

**3. The principal's expectations in an attempt to minimize conflict and appease stakeholders.**

The school principals of the four sites included in this study were relatively passive and uninvolved participants in the figured worlds' construction of the LMS identity role within their schools. As Church (2007) noted, "Principals learn what library media specialists can and should do from library media specialists" (Implications, para. 3). The understandings of the LMSs roles exhibited by these four principals did conform to Church's finding; their expectations seemed based primarily on the experiences they had with the LMS currently or most recently on staff in their schools. The common expression of a wish for "a busy" library or an LMS who would simply "do something" by the administrators provided the novice LMSs with an extremely vague directive and understanding of their supervisors' expectations. Whether their principal expressed a general satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the current model of school librarianship evidenced in their building, the participant LMSs all expressed an understanding that their principals would probably be satisfied with their performance if the library media center had

some activity in it and if they stayed off of the principal's radar by keeping the peace with other participants in their figured world. In order to accomplish his goal of a busier media center, the principal at Maya's school had placed the library on a fixed schedule, giving the LMSs little opportunity to provide meaningful instruction at point of need to students or to develop collaborative relationships with classroom teachers since they were providing teachers planning time during their library block. Ian and Lara both clearly expressed their intentions to do whatever was necessary to keep their principals' satisfied; they both indicated, however, that this was not going to be difficult since their principals' rarely visited the media center and seemed to feel that the library was an area of low priority for their administrators. Early in the year, Lara observed,

This school is so huge and I think right now he's just so busy because the school is in needs improvement and I think it's like in the second level of needs improvement. So, I don't think that the focus right now is, What is she doing in the library?

But later in the school year, her principal's obvious lack of understanding of the role of the media center and LMS in teaching and learning became frustrating.

The principal...I don't think he...I mean, I know he was gung ho about having somebody a little different in here that would do some different things but I still don't think he thinks it's important. Because if anything is happening they shut down the media center.

Ian's observation about his principal's lack of concern for the media program was similarly discouraged:

And his actions say pretty much what his strategy is. He's got more concerns than in heaven and earth, and it's true, he really does. He can let the media center go because is it really worth his time? No, it isn't.

This well-documented lack of administrator understanding of the roles of the LMS on the part of administrators (Church, 2007; Dorrell & Lawson, 1995; A. Kaplan, 2006; Van Hamersveld, 2007) points to this aspect of the new LMSs figured world as

a common challenge to new LMSs. It appears, unfortunately, to be part of the vicious cycle of misunderstanding and lack of awareness of LMS's roles that perpetuates the adoption of less than ideal LMS identities. Teachers and administrators learn about what LMSs do from LMSs do; LMSs often do what teachers and administrators expect in order to keep conflict at bay...and to keep their jobs.

### **Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research**

#### **Summary**

This study explored the ways in which new LMSs described their emerging professional identities during their first year of practice and the factors, both historical and contextual, that contributed to those identities. The novice LMSs struggled with the identities available to them in their figured worlds but, in most cases, did not challenge the pre-conceived notions of school librarianship held by the teachers, administrators, and students at their schools. These identities had been constructed primarily in accordance with an existing or previous LMS's behaviors and identity. The novices outwardly conformed to the expectations of those they interacted with most – their co-LMSs and the teachers. During the deconstruction and reconstruction of their identities, the participants tended, similarly to the new teachers in Flores and Day's study, to slip back into the model of LMS practice that felt most familiar and comfortable – those that they had observed during pre-service. Thus, Lara read stories and shelved books; Maya taught "lessons" in isolation from the curriculum and tried to help students find books that they would enjoy reading; Ian worked as a "clerk" checking books in and out and letting students and teachers vent to him about his partner. Pam, however, was the most conflicted of the four and struggled with finding a way to move toward the kind of LMS practice that would

allow her to feel that she was performing the job in the way it was described during her preparation program while maintaining civility with her co-LMS.

As noted in the review of literature, there is a significant body of research that documents the rampant misunderstanding of the role of the LMS. Not only are administrators, teachers, and students unaware of the purpose, mission, and value of a fully functioning library media program, library media specialists themselves often have trouble articulating what it is they do and why it is important . In recent years, this lack of understanding has led to a devaluing of school libraries and to a weakening of state rules governing requirements for school library staffing across the country. The quote from Ross Todd (2008b) at the beginning of this chapter is a call to arms: “If school librarians can’t prove they make a difference, they may cease to exist” (p. 39).

### **Conclusions**

Like teachers, LMSs enter their training programs with ideas and perceptions of what an LMS is and does. These ideas are derived from personal history, including observations of LMSs encountered during their own K12 schooling, in school libraries in the schools in which they’ve worked or spent time in adulthood, or during their preparation programs. Once the decision to pursue certification in library media has been made, pre-service LMSs progress through a course of study that provides them with highly divergent models of school librarianship. The results of this study indicate that students emerging from these programs may not be adequately prepared to implement the types of library media programs that challenge the dominant discourses in place in the figured worlds of K12 schools. What is notable is that, of the four participants in this study, only Pam seemed to be continuously driven to enact the idealized identity of the LMS as

presented by the American Association of School Librarians and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards – the model presented to her in her master’s program. This identity included the roles of teacher, program administrator, technology leader, instructional consultant, and information specialist. Although the other candidates became more focused on one or two of these roles, all four had begun to make plans for the ways in which they would strive to enact their own idealized identities during their second year of practice. It is unfortunate that, due to the District’s budget cuts, three of the four did not return to work the following year to continue their professional journey.

Historical and biographical factors, the context and culture of the school, and preparation and training were the factors that came to bear upon the identities of the four novice library media specialists we got to know in this study. These factors combined to create a position for the LMS that was often in conflict with the identities with which the participants began work. All four struggled with one or more of the possible roles offered by their figured worlds. Flores and Day (2006) recognized this stage of professional identity building as a stage of destabilization and deconstruction. They found context to be the key factor in professional identity construction, although personal history was not obliterated but mediated by school context and culture. The novice LMSs eventually began to conceive of a professional identity that allowed some aspect of the idealized vision of their professional selves to be enacted. The aspects of figured worlds of practice that exerted the strongest influence upon the construction of the participants’ professional identities were the presence of a partner LMS, teacher beliefs and expectations about what an LMS is and does, and the principals’ expectations for the LMS. These new library media specialists deconstructed the LMS identities they had developed through personal

history and experiences and began to reconstruct their view of themselves as LMSs based on the positions offered by the figured worlds of their schools. To illustrate the influences on and progressive nature of the identities of the participants in this study, I have developed the model below (see Figure 4). This model illustrates the interconnectedness of personal history, training, and contexts of practice on the evolving identity of the library media specialist.

Figure 4

LMS Identity Construction Flow Chart

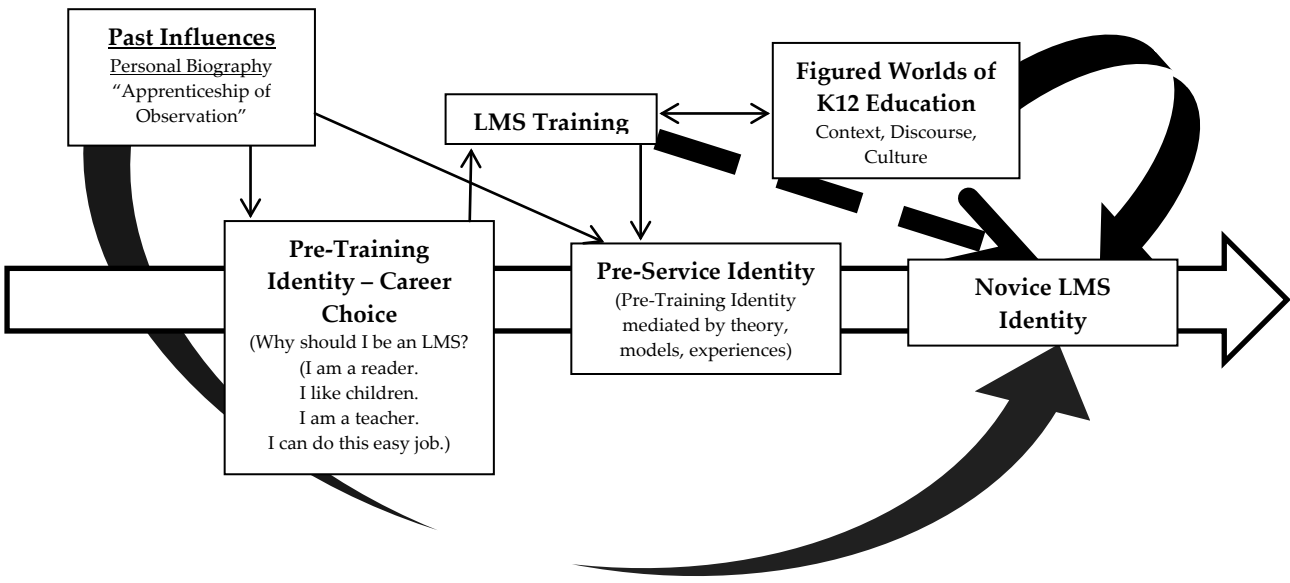


Figure 4. Author created LMS Identity Flow Chart

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The relationship between LMS training and preparation and development of LMS professional identity is an under explored construct. Further research into the impact of preparation programs on actual practices is warranted. I believe in keeping with teacher identity research (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003), that providing student LMSs with opportunities to reflect upon the interplay of their personal biographies and the figured worlds of K12 schools would allow for the examination of possible tensions between their pre-formed identities and the conditions that exist in the schoolhouse. Novices who are better prepared for the inevitable dissonance between their pre-service expectations and the reality of practice may be able to resist slipping into the traditional LMS roles with which the members of their figured worlds may be more familiar and negotiate identities that are aligned with the best practices introduced during their preparation programs.

Once an LMS begins work in a school library media center, numerous factors influence the ways in which they develop an LMS identity. Some LMSs construct identities that empower them and their library media programs to provide the types of learning environments and experiences that give students enhanced learning opportunities. Qualitative and quantitative studies investigating the characteristics shared by LMSs who succeed at developing those identities, including the types of preparation programs attended, personal histories, or induction and mentoring experiences, would be useful additions to the existing knowledge base. Because the one participant in this study who attended a fully face-to-face preparation program was the novice whose program seemed to have the most impact on their LMS identity, a study that explored the differences in identity construction between those who attended face-to-face versus online programs could be a vital addition to the

growing research regarding how best to prepare 21<sup>st</sup> century library media specialists.

Finally, the influence of fellow LMSs, both pre-service and in-service, on novices' identity construction was clearly demonstrated through this research. Research into the ways internship experiences impact future identity construction of LMSs could help guide preparation programs as they evaluate learning opportunities for student LMSs. Additionally, explorations of the dynamics of co-LMS relationships and the ways in which identity is negotiated when a role is shared could inform LMS training, induction and mentoring.

The epilogues at the end of three of the participants' chapters (those who were laid off from the District) told poignant stories of personal and professional disappointment and crisis. Although these participants were reliable, qualified, and diligent in attempting to enact their LMS duties and roles as they understood them, they were dismissed from their jobs while other less qualified candidates remained employed. I cannot help but believe that the chronic misunderstanding of the LMSs roles, functions, and value to the educational communities to which they belong contributed to the decisions made by administrators regarding the staffing in the *figured worlds* of their schools. Preparing school library media specialists with strong pre-service identities and equally strong understandings of the LMS roles and identities will position the LMS to help teachers, students, and administrators accomplish the types of teaching and learning demanded by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century global economy. As O'Neal concluded, "in order to bring reality to the media specialists performing instructional roles, administrators, teachers, and **media specialists** (emphasis added) must know and understand the functions of the media center programs in curriculum and instruction" (2004, p. 299). Library media specialists

must have strong, clear understandings of what it means to be a library media specialist in order to enact the unique roles they can play in the figured world of K12 education.

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