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The Evolving Roles of School Librarians in Diverse Instructional Settings

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Kennesaw State University

July 2022

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education in the Bagwell College of Education

Dr. Julie Moore, Chair

Dr. Olga Koz, Committee Member

Dr. Camille Sutton-Brown, Committee Member

Abstract

In 2020 and 2021, K-12 instructional settings diversified worldwide due to COVID-19 pandemic-response. During the 2021-2022 school year, a new instructional setting of K-12 remote-synchronous learning launched in a progressive, southeastern U.S. public school district. Substantial school district realignment occurred to serve this new setting; bypassed, however, was a dedicated school librarian position. Despite positive national impact data and the school library profession's demonstrated ability since the mid-twentieth century to evolve, newly created positions have been funded nationally in schools to evolve with the times, often at the expense of school library positions. Role tensions may emerge between school librarians and other school positions. School librarians' lived experiences within this congruence of tensions provides a unique research opportunity. The methodology of the study is phenomenology. A purposive, non-random sample of six school librarians comprised the sample population. Initial and follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants, and data was analyzed to yield rich description of the essence of the participants' lived experiences. The findings suggest that trends toward standardization of their professional role(s) are countered by the pandemic's contributions to student learning loss and thus, a critical need exists for the school librarians' role(s). Implications for school librarians are that they are strongly positioned to thrive during further evolutions of their role(s) as instructional settings continue to diversify and students' needs change. Implications for school administrators are that school librarians are willing and ready to assume a critical role in literacy instruction that they foresee as urgent.

Keywords: phenomenology, COVID-19 pandemic, school librarians, instructional technology, diverse instructional settings, remote-synchronous learning, role theory, disruptive innovation.

Dedication

Culmination of this degree, including completion of this work, is dedicated to my family: my wonderful husband, Rick, and my precious sons, Sean and Bruce Wright. Thank you for your unwavering support through the years as we made this degree attainment possible together, as a family.

This degree is also dedicated to my parents, Herbert and Mary George McGuffee. Even though you are unable to see this degree realized, you laid the groundwork for its attainment in every possible way by instilling in me from the youngest age the importance of higher education and civic life. Thank you also, mom, for modeling for me a rewarding career in K-12 education that I rely upon to carry me through all decisions. Finally, thank you, mom, for letting me in on the ‘secret’ – “the school librarian is the best job in a school.”

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I owe a special acknowledgement to my principals over 24 years. Each of you has built leadership capacity in me and granted me the autonomy to innovate and evolve into new roles for both my professional growth and the betterment of each school. For these experiences, I thank you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Contextualizing the Study

The cultural phenomenon of the early 2020s decade known as *The Great Resignation* floods our news feeds with its resilience, reminding us that the COVID-19 pandemic has permanently altered the landscape of the global workforce. Just as the defining feature of *The Great Resignation* is worker autonomy, K-12 public education is in kind answering to the cultural phenomenon of family life and learner autonomy. With alternative education previously a cultural niche that families met through homeschool, charter, or private school options, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought forward a new public school instructional setting into the mainstream, permanent K-12 remote-synchronous instruction. As a researcher and practicing high school librarian of 24 years, I embarked upon this phenomenological study of school librarians experiencing this new instructional setting in its permanency, as well as other diversifying settings from the pandemic itself, with a self-awareness of autonomous forces continuing their march.

The question of whether one is experiencing or observing a phenomenon in a local bubble or a broader context is a valid one, and each of those possibilities is indeed worthy of qualitative research. The new instructional setting seeded locally to this study during the 2021-2022 school year, a permanent K-12 remote-synchronous learning option, was indeed a national phenomenon. As a news junkie reading my daily habit of *POLITICO* online during the data collection phase of this study, I opened the pandemic-inspired education article “*I Feel Half as Successful...*” (Shah, 2021) and read about this southeastern U.S. study’s new instructional setting simultaneously launched for 2021-2022 in Frederick, MD (Shah, 2021; Atelsek, 2021). The holding power of this innovative setting, permanent K-12 remote-synchronous learning, may

be that it supports the autonomy of family life while alleviating the crisis fueling teachers' contributions to *The Great Resignation*. Investigated in this study was the perception of K-12 school librarians experiencing this new instructional setting in its first year of implementation, school librarians being a cultural group political in nature and sensitive to technology's historical evolution of their professional role(s).

Background

The K-12 school librarian is a professional educator primed to adapt to evolving learning environments. With the historical roots of librarianship grounded in the preservation of the printed word in a protected location, librarianship in early 20th-century K-12 school settings originated by the same model. School librarians in the early 20th-century served as the keeper of the books and the sole source of deeper knowledge beyond the classroom walls. The introduction of audio-visual technology into schools in the mid-20th century presented the first disruption to the established role of the school librarian, who in response pivoted to include acquisition, protection, and integration of all media in use in educational settings. A new title was needed to reflect the broader role, and the title of media specialist emerged. The subsequent information age ushered in ubiquitous technology in classrooms and the emergence of instructional technology as its own professional field. A new era of student-centered learning took hold, focused on the four c's: collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. In response, the school library profession needed to assume a more critical pedagogical role, and a shift in nomenclature to 'teacher-librarian' marked that transition before a historical nod to 'school librarian' was revisited, once again. None of these evolutionary changes occurred in a vacuum, as many school librarians will anecdotally share that the 2000s strength of the Barnes and Noble coffee shop, genre-browsing model did more to reclassify high school library

collections to compete than any position statement of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). Now largely manifested in the iteration of a present-day Learning Commons, school patrons today will encounter communal gathering spaces, a technology-rich environment for collaboration, and comfortable seating in browsing areas of Young Adult fiction organized by genre rather than the Dewey Decimal System.

The relationship between the fields of school librarianship and instructional technology is closely connected. In the early to mid-2000s, colloquially known to veteran school librarians as the days of the Wild West, high school librarians were the instructional technology specialists of their schools and districts. Technology leadership was abundant in the high school librarian's role, as practitioners led decision-making committees that reviewed school technology needs, accepted bids, reviewed proposals, and managed technology budget expenditures.

On the pedagogical side of the time, the instructional focus of the *No Child Left Behind* era was the Senior Project, known by different names across states, but comparable across states as a high school graduation requirement. Minnesota's effort was the Profile of Learning (POL), enacted as a graduation requirement between the years 1998-2003. Kelsey (2006) notes that "school library media specialists (SLMSs) were said to be in demand as never before because of the way the student learning activities were designed by the State. They were process-oriented, requiring research, reading, reflection and synthesis of ideas" (p. 6). Technology leadership and instructional partnerships merged beautifully for the school library profession during this era. This heyday for school librarianship continued until the purse strings dried up during the late-decade recession beginning in 2008. Jarring cuts came to school library positions and budgets, Senior Project graduation requirements were simultaneously relaxed across states, and

instructional technology emerged as its own field rather than a librarianship integration, giving the profession of school librarianship a run for its money.

As a practicing high school librarian and instructional technology graduate student in 2016, I felt the ground shift under me when my *Program Evaluation* professor assigned alongside the syllabus a journal article titled “Blurred Lines: The School Librarian and the Technology Specialist” (Johnston, 2015a). Presented in tandem, the professor’s two documents on the opening salvo seemed to grant them equal weight. The journal article’s perspective presented an encroachment into my professional territory that I perceived as a threat: the concept of role had entered my psyche for processing, uninvited. The following year, 2017, a K-12 school leadership professor presented an analogy to my class: imagine the well-known image of a career ladder. Now, she explained, in your mind, topple the ladder. In today’s schools, she continued, the representation of the career ladder is obsolete, replaced by a jungle gym, a more complex structure with interconnected parts. The image of the jungle gym, she said, accurately represents the complexity of the collaborative leadership teams steering K-12 schools today.

Acknowledging their shared history, in October of 2021, the Georgia Library Association and Georgia Association for Instructional Technology held their annual joint state conference, themed for 2021 as “Enduring and Evolving” (GLA, 2021). The two interconnected K-12 disciplines of school librarianship and instructional technology have endured, and evolved, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the pandemic has served as an accelerant to change processes already in motion. Within the southeastern U.S. school district serving as the setting of this study, a new learning option resulting from the pandemic’s crisis learning response commenced in the fall semester of 2021, a third setting in addition to traditional brick-and-mortar settings and blended/online learning settings. The characteristics of the new learning

option are a remote setting with permanency, offering synchronous instruction for grades K-12 in a public school district without enrollment caps. Significant personnel and resource realignment occurred within the district for implementation of the additional model, with 1 in 7 of the school district's student population selecting this instructional option in its inaugural year. While structural realignment occurred across the board in the areas of administration, teaching, and support personnel to accommodate K-12 students selecting the new model, the structure of the district's 49 K-12 school librarians remained continuous with previous norms.

The profession of school librarianship has been one of evolutionary change, weathering tensions such as federal legislation and educational policy, cultural trends, pedagogical shifts, technology implementation and economic recession, to name a few. With these examples in mind, Wine (2016) notes that the "role of school librarians has a history of radical change" (p. 207), while Dickinson (2015) characterizes the trajectory of school librarianship as "rapid and pervasive change, along with occasional instances of cataclysmic change" (p. 24). Post-pandemic, the proliferation with which instructional settings are currently diversifying is perhaps another cataclysmic change underway for the profession of school librarianship.

Revisiting the visual image of the jungle gym as a structural metaphor, issues of role strain and role conflict may emerge for school librarians as they navigate their evolving roles in unprecedented times of educational realignment. Beagle (1999) notes that "Even the most adaptive organization begins to show signs of strain as it attempts to cope with the relentless growth of services" (p. 84). The question of what it means to be a K-12 school librarian in a progressive school district during the evolutionary years of the COVID-19 pandemic is a question worthy of investigation.

Statement of the Problem

In 2020 and 2021, K-12 instructional settings diversified worldwide due to pandemic-response (Azorin, 2020; Bishop, 2021). During the 2021-2022 school year, a new instructional setting of K-12 remote-synchronous learning launched in a progressive, southeastern U.S. public school district. Transitioning from a pandemic-response model to a permanent learning option known as “Apex Virtual” [pseudonym] for the purposes of this study, substantial school district realignment occurred to serve this new setting’s population of dedicated administrators, core content and elective teachers, school counselors, a graduation coach, and support services. Bypassed, however, was a dedicated K-12 school librarian position to serve the new instructional setting of not only students, but also faculty/staff with whom school librarians partner to fulfill traditional instructional roles. This missed hiring opportunity for a dedicated K-12 school librarian position continues the pattern of drastic job losses rocking the profession since *The Great Recession* of 2008 (Morris & Cahill, 2016; Loertscher, 2018) and is the type of evolutionary change within the profession that Dickinson (2015) characterizes as cataclysmic.

Research consistently shows positive relationships between school library programs and student achievement gains, and school librarians often cite this data when advocating for the value of their role(s) in schools. Lance and Kachel (2018) cite 34 impact studies across 26 states that correlate full-time, certified school librarians and student gains in test scores regardless of student demographics or characteristics of the school. Despite this positive impact data and the school library profession’s demonstrated ability since the mid-twentieth century to evolve, newly created positions have been funded nationally in schools to evolve with the times, often at the expense of school library positions (Lance & Kachel, 2018).

Role tensions have emerged between school librarians and other school positions (Johnston, 2015a; Loertscher, 2018). Organizational work roles are interdependent relationships with others and thus, by nature, can lead to issues of role conflict and role ambiguity (Ebberts & Wijnberg, 2017). As evidenced by omission from a dedicated position within the new Apex Virtual structure, coupled with navigation of evolving work role(s) and dynamics of interdependent work relationships, sustainability of the profession is at risk. School librarians' lived experiences within this congruence of tensions provides a unique opportunity to research a phenomenon.

Research Question

The overarching research question for this phenomenological study of the evolution of school librarians' professional roles in diverse instructional settings allows school librarians to provide rich descriptions within an open-ended, semi-structured interview format, conducive to the emergence of themes. The overarching question and sub-questions address the statement of the problem, while incorporating the conceptual framework of multi-roles evolving for school librarians from the disruptive diversification of instructional settings, and related impacts to those multi-roles such as role conflict and/or role strain.

The overarching question for this study is:

RQ: What does it mean to be a school librarian during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The sub-questions for this study are:

Q1: As instructional settings diversify within a 1:1 school district, how, if at all, do K-12 school librarians experience their roles evolving and/or proliferating?

Q2: As instructional settings diversify within a 1:1 school district, how, if at all, have school librarians experienced role conflict and/or role strain?

Q3: How, if at all, do school librarians respond to multi-role work environments to ensure continued success in their professional role(s)?

Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this phenomenological research study is to explore multi-role perceptions, experiences, and responses as they evolve for school librarians from the disruptive diversification of instructional settings, and related impacts to those multi-role perceptions such as role conflict and/or role strain. Within the setting of this study is a potentially cataclysmic change to local school librarians' roles that is reflective of an emerging nationwide model, a remote-synchronous learning model born of the pandemic and cementing into permanency.

The study is of significance to all district-level policy-makers who form organizational structures and make budget and hiring decisions, as well as instructional technology and information services departments who collaborate and co-lead technology integration with school librarians. Building principals who strongly inform school librarians' roles would also benefit from the study, as would school librarians themselves, who must be able to lead effectively within diversifying instructional settings while maintaining their core value of positively impacting student achievement. The study will fulfill a literature gap in the area of school librarians' experiences within the pandemic as an accelerant or subsiding factor in evolution their roles. Other literature gaps that the study will fulfill are school librarians' experiences with role strain and/or role conflict within the launch of a new instructional model, and their responses to emerging educational emphases such as new pedagogies and digital equity issues as remote learning moves from a crisis response model to a permanent instructional model.

Local Context

Summit School District (SSD) [pseudonym] is located in the southeastern United States and is classified as a rural school district according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (NCES, 2021). The student population of SSD was 43,009 in grades K-12 at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. For the same reporting period, the student demographics of SSD were 56% Black, 26% White, 11% Hispanic, 5% Multi-racial, and 3% Asian/Pacific Islander. 49% of the student population was identified as Economically Disadvantaged (ED), 13.3% was identified as Students with Disability (SWD), and 3% was identified as English Language Learners (ELL). SSD has a student mobility rate of 17.6%. SSD comprises 49 schools which includes 10 comprehensive high schools, 11 middle schools, and 28 elementary schools. In addition, SSD hosts an expanding blended and virtual learning academy, Apex Academy (which is further described in the description of the setting of this study), and a career/technical education academy.

Academically, the CCRPI score for SSD ranks slightly above the state average. In 2019, the latest year of available data due to suspension of CCRPI reporting as a result of the pandemic, SSD's CCRPI score was 77.3, while the state's CCRPI score in that same year was 75.9. The overall letter-grade rating for SSD is currently a "C," with 2019 being the latest year reported. From examining this data, challenges are revealed at each school level. For example, at the elementary level, bellwether categories fall below the state average: students scoring as Proficient or Distinguished in the categories of English, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science, and 3rd and 5th graders scoring at or above grade level in Reading. At the middle school level, the data is consistent to the elementary level. Students scoring Proficient or Distinguished fall below the state average in all sub-areas with the exception of middle school Science, and

students score slightly below grade level in Reading. At the high school level, all tested areas with the exception of American Literature's Proficient ranking fall below the state average, as well. One bright spot is evident in SSD's data, however. The four-year graduation rate is higher than the state average (87.0 for SSD compared to 82.0 for the state).

In response to these academic challenges, SSD has been proactive to address these data points while providing the strongest support structures available for students. SSD is a 1:1 district in support of technology-enabled instruction. All students in grades 3 – 12 receive a Chromebook for use at school and at home, and students in grades K – 2 have access to iPads for use in the classroom setting. In support of the 1:1 initiative, a number of instructional technology tools and platforms are available. Some of those platforms include: Google Classroom, Google Meet, NearPod, OverDrive (e-books), Dreambox Learning, and ST Math.

Within SSD, school librarians are encompassed within the Information Services Division of the district's central office, and the present Chief Information Services Officer, a position included within the Superintendent's Executive Cabinet, began his educational career as a high school librarian. School librarians report to the Director of Instructional Technology, within the same division, and the 49 school librarians work in close coordination with the five instructional technology specialists who serve the whole district. Ongoing professional development for school librarians is coordinated by the district's Instructional Technology Department, as well as performance expectations communicated to building principals who conduct performative evaluations of the school librarians. As an example of the dynamic, the artifact "Look-Fors to Support Balanced Instruction for Instructional Technology" (see Appendix A) was distributed by the Instructional Technology Department for implementation during the pandemic's initial remote learning year, 2020-2021. The artifact shows guideposts considered hallmarks of school

librarianship, such as teaching digital citizenship, emphasized along with emerging roles, such as organizing a new Digital Classroom.

Since the fall of 2017, SSD has been under the leadership of an innovative superintendent taking an aggressive approach to addressing gaps in SSD's data. Some of those initiatives include common assessments, rollout of the SSD Teaching and Learning Standards, a focus on implementation of a social and emotional learning curriculum, and provision for a 'one-stop shop' of technology resources available to teachers and students. A groundbreaking innovation for SSD has launched in the fall semester of 2021, a full-time, permanent synchronous learning option for any student in grades K-12 who wishes to continue remote instruction independent of the pandemic. This option is not web-based, or blended, but rather students follow a traditional bell schedule from home, attending live classes with their peers and teacher in real time. At the time of the writing of this dissertation as the first year concludes, the roles for the school librarian in serving their population of students remains undefined (students maintain a cross-enrollment with their brick-and-mortar school for athletics and extracurricular activities). School librarians serving for the first time with the additional model provide the sample population for the phenomenological study. SSD's new, 5-year Strategic Plan for the years 2021-2026 was unveiled in the spring of 2021, focusing on three priority student outcomes of Literacy Proficiency, Readiness to Learn, and College, Career and Life Ready Skills. SSD has clear plans for increasing the data points while celebrating and building upon the district's current successes.

Professional Context

The professional standard-bearer and lobbying arm for the K-12 school library profession is the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the American Library

Association (ALA). AASL publishes the standards by which school librarians inform their work and through which they can influence policy and budget decisions through advocacy work at the federal, state, and local level. As school reforms came to fruition, such as stemming from the 1983 federal report *A Nation at Risk: An Imperative for Educational Reform*, from the legislation *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* of 1994, and from the legislation *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Kelsey, 2006), the AASL Standards for school librarians evolved accordingly. Central to all AASL Standards has been the school librarian's role in impacting instruction and student achievement, while redefining the professional role(s) in alignment with school reforms. AASL has published four sets of Standards since 1988, each of which redefines the school librarian's primary professional role. These distinctions are: the school librarian as an instructional consultant with the publication of *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (1988); the school librarian as an instructional partner with the 1998 update of *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (Neuman, 2003); the school librarian as an instructional leader with the 2009 publication of *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (AASL, 2009); and the school librarian as a teacher in support of student inquiry and process learning (AASL, 2019a; AASL, 2019b; Loertscher, 2018) with the 2018 publication of the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* (AASL, 2018a).

In 2009, with AASL's publication of the profession's first program guideline update in over 10 years, *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (AASL, 2009), AASL added the charge of technology leadership as an expected role for school librarians, establishing that school librarians were no longer siloed to an instructional support role (Johnston & Green, 2018). This development is of significance to this study because it marked a role

transition of the school librarian reflecting the intricacies of the jungle gym metaphor, not only in one's local context, but officially recognized by the AASL body.

In 2018, publication of updated AASL Standards pivoted toward the teaching of inquiry. Former AASL President David Loertscher (1995-96) noted professional retreat in his review of the 2018 AASL Standards: “we get the sense that inquiry is the major role, and technology leadership is absent. A disaster” (p. 40). Further, “the message seems to be that the classroom teacher is in charge of content learning and the librarian is in charge of process learning. Big mistake...when push comes to shove, the teachers can teach inquiry” (Loertscher, 2018, p. 41); “no actual partnership is suggested” (p. 45). These questions persist through cycles within the profession.

The above context of school librarians' collective understanding of the profession's guideposts, through initial preparation and degree attainment, followed by state certification processes and finally cultural norms resulting from experience, is important to establish as a factor in this study because the concept of 'role' is one in which school librarians are already likely to be cognizant of as an ongoing process of reflection. 'Role' for school librarians serves as a lens, per se, through which they perceive their contributions to their interdependent school-work environments, such as with the instructional technology specialist, the instructional coach, technology teams, etc.

Conceptual Framework

Instructional settings diversified worldwide in 2020. Azorin (2020) notes that over 160 countries implemented mandatory school closures during the pandemic while innovating instruction; the following year Bishop (2021) placed the number of countries at 192. While it is uncertain if crisis-response instructional models will largely return to their pre-pandemic state or

evolve into new settings with the potential for holding power, such as Apex Virtual, an understanding of the human experience is worthy of research. Azorin (2020) captures the validity of the human experience in posing the question of whether there will be “allies to support this evolution” (p. 382). In the context of school librarianship, this question speaks to how one is experiencing their own role as the profession’s evolutions are occurring. An understanding of a collective human experience lends itself to a study through phenomenology in an effort to describe the essence of a lived experience.

The conceptual framework for this phenomenological study bridges two theories, role theory and disruptive innovation, to examine the local context of a lived experience. The study considers the possibility that the instructional model of pandemic response, implemented by SSD in the 2021-2022 school year, the K-12 remote-synchronous instructional model known as Apex Virtual, may represent in its inaugural year a disruptive innovation within the context of public education, one that may further evolve the K-12 school librarian’s professional role(s). Shank (2011) builds a bridge between the theories of disruptive innovation and librarians’ roles, proposing that the emerging field of blended librarianship is librarian-centric, not library-centric: “the very forces that are changing the processes of learning and education are also changing librarianship. They are drawing it closer to and literally entwining it with those processes. The educational role is thus a primary goal...” (p. 106).

A educational disruptive innovation is defined by Christensen et al. (2011) as an innovation where “definitions and trajectories of improvement change” (p. 44), and the next iteration of blended/online learning, described by Staker (2011) as “a classic disruptive innovation with the potential not just to improve the current model of education delivery, but to

transform it” (p. 1). Staker (2011) asserted that “In true disruptive fashion, online learning is expanding beyond its roots” (p. 2). Apex Virtual holds promise for transformative capability.

Biddle (2013) defines role theory as “a science concerned with the study of behaviors that are characteristic of persons within contexts and with various processes that presumably produce, explain, or are affected by those behaviors” (p. 4). Zai (2015) conducted a study of academic librarians, similar to this study of K-12 school librarians, using the approach of role theory to examine the teaching of information literacy skills by academic librarians to undergraduate students. Zai (2015) noted that the phenomena of “role conflict, role strain, role overload, and conformity amongst academic librarians themselves and between librarians and classroom faculty have been recorded” (p. 13). Within school librarianship, this dynamic is cited in the literature by Johnston (2015a) as occurring between school librarians and instructional technology specialists as technology leadership roles evolve. Role conflict may be informed by employees’ perceptions of one’s own role, which can sometimes be influenced by role ambiguity: “employees’ role perceptions may be informed by job descriptions, performance expectations, and organizational culture” (Elkins, 2018, p. 87). Prior to the latest potential disruptive innovation of the remote synchronous instructional model, the K-12 school library profession has experienced numerous motivators and barriers throughout its tradition that have led to role phenomena. Those motivators and barriers include changes in national accountability standards, state and local school reform efforts, the impact of online learning within library settings, budgetary constraints (Houston & Paganelli, 2015), changes in nomenclature of the job title and physical library space, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The review of literature will encompass many of these factors as motivators and barriers to the evolution of the school librarian’s role(s) prior to and within the ongoing pandemic.

Role ambiguity may also be experienced by others based upon an employee's own actions in their role: "Roles may change...as the employee assigned to their role performs it, changing the organization's perception of the role" (Elkins, 2018, p. 88). Others' perceptions are important to informing the school librarian's self-perception of their role(s) because of the interconnected nature of school positions today, as reflected by the analogy of the jungle gym. Johnston (2015a) notes that role ambiguity not only impacts those holding the role, but other stakeholders, as well, such as school administrators, teachers, and even students.

A beneficial lens to studying role conflict, a goal of this study, is presented by Ebbers and Wijnberg (2017) and Rai (2016). Ebbers and Wijnberg (2017) state "role conflict and role ambiguity can [also] have positive effects, precisely because they force individuals to define their role...when organizational members define their roles this, in turn, can lead to others in adjacent roles subsequently redefining their roles, which can lead to positive outcomes for the organization as a whole" (p. 1343). Rai's (2016) study of the healthcare industry, a human service industry such as librarianship, sought to "identify the positive antecedents of role conflict and role ambiguity, examine their relationship in human service organizations, and link them to quality of service, which can then contribute to improving the human condition" (p. 509).

Johnston (2015b) cites Spillane (2006) in stating that "research suggests that there are three mechanisms that can determine how leadership is distributed: by design, by default, and by crisis" (p. 48). This investigation considers that the latest potential disruptive innovation of K-12 remote-synchronous learning might have been born of crisis, but now transition is occurring into a cycle of design, and school librarians (as well as others) must understand the capacity of their role(s) for successful evolution. Johnston (2015b) suggests that "there are often unanticipated events or challenges within schools that call for teacher librarians...to contribute to leadership"

(p. 49). This study will examine themes such as embedded librarianship for technology integration, instructional design, and data and information literacy to understand school librarians' perceptions, experiences, and responses to building capacity within diverse instructional settings.

As a researcher who holds a worldview of social constructivism, I will be able to make meaning from this study, as will others, and utilize rich description to provide readers a perspective from which they may improve their own practice through the process of naturalistic generalization. As a group of school librarians who are experiencing a new phenomenon for the first time during the data collection phase of this study, and the study's goal is to understand the essence of their lived experience, a phenomenological study is appropriate.

Review of Relevant Terms

Instructional setting – “refers to the instructional, behavioral, and personal aspects of the classroom experience” (NCSSLE, 2021).

Multi-role environment – the subjective perception of role forces due to pressures, which may be experienced individually or collectively (Duxbury, Stevenson & Higgins, 2018).

Disruptive innovation – “focuses on the application of technology rather than the technology itself” (Adekoya & Adedimeji, 2021, p. 3). As applied to the field of library science, “the theory for describing how networked digital technologies and platforms transform libraries” (Adekoya & Adedimeji, 2021, p. 4).

Blended learning - “a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace; at least in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home; and the

modalities along each student's learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience" (Boyer & Kelly, 2014, p. 4).

Embedded librarianship - "refers to the practice of school librarians integrating their expertise into content area classes...Although it is most often discussed in academic contexts, embedded librarianship has been implemented successfully by all types of librarians" (Boyer, 2015, p. 72).

Online learning - "Delivers instruction and content primarily over the Internet. Used interchangeably with Virtual learning, Cyber learning, e-learning. Students can participate in online learning through one course (supplemental), or a fully online school or program" (Boyer & Kelly, 2014, p. 4).

Remote synchronous learning - as recognized by the setting of the study, a new learning option whereby K-12 students may elect to attend live instruction synchronously off-site. While some elements of blended learning may be utilized, the pedagogy of the instructional model (a permanent offspring of the pandemic), including the use of technology, is considered novel within the setting.

Role ambiguity - "uncertainty about which tasks and responsibilities are part of the role" (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017, p. 1343).

Role conflict - "when demands associated with one role interfere directly with one's ability to satisfy the demands of another role" (Hecht, 2001, p. 112).

Role strain - a stressor(s) which can impact optimal performance of a role, and includes the concepts of role conflict and role overload (Hecht, 2001).

Organization of Study

This dissertation is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes a contextualization of the study, the background of the study, statement of the problem, overarching research question and sub-questions, purpose and significance of the study, the local context, the professional context, the conceptual framework, a review of the relevant terms, and the organization of the study.

Chapter 2 comprises the literature review. The literature review includes an introduction, a review of the literature strands organized by the study's methodology, relevant theories and school librarians' traditional and emerging roles, and a summary and implications of the literature review.

Chapter 3 comprises the methodology. The methodology restates the overarching research question and sub-questions, and includes the researcher's worldview and role of the researcher. The research design is presented to include a justification for phenomenological research along with the value of the methodology. The setting of the study is described, followed by the overall and sample populations, a description of participants, an overview of access to the site, the data collection procedures, the data analysis procedures, the validity of interpretation, limitations and delimitation, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 comprises the findings of the study. The findings includes an introduction, a discussion of three major themes that emerged from interpretation of the data, as well as a discussion of findings related to the overarching research question. Findings relating to the overarching research question are organized by the relevant sub-questions.

Chapter 5, the final chapter, comprises the discussion of the results of the study. The discussion includes a summary of research findings, a discussion of the findings relating to the

literature, the implications of the findings on school library practitioners, the implications of the findings on school administrators, as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The review of research is organized around school librarian professional roles prevalent in the literature, recognizing that themes may overlap within the roles as presented in this review. For example, if a school librarian is an effective information specialist in one's service, then one is likely exhibiting technology leadership attributes both as a self-identifier and by peer recognition. The themes surrounding professional roles are co-dependent and thus guide the study's theoretical frameworks of role theory and disruptive innovation. This review of research is organized around the study's methodology, the study's theories informing the conceptual framework, themes of the school librarian as an instructional partner, a technology leader, an information specialist, and as an innovator within emerging school librarianship roles.

The foundation of the research, as well as the standards of the profession's recognized body, establish that a school librarian's role(s) evolve, thus providing precedence for the research study's area of interest. Following an explanation within the introduction of the history of the evolving role(s) of school librarians as established by the national AASL standards and among seminal researchers of school librarianship, the theoretical frameworks are situated relevant to the study, and the review of research is presented. The review of research includes an explanation of coverage of the scope of this review.

The AASL, through each subsequent release of professional guidelines and standards from the mid-20th century to present, acknowledges "the current realities and evolving dynamics" (ALA, 2020) of K-12 school librarianship. In the time period between AASL's release of 1998's Standards known as *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (AASL & AECT, 1998), and AASL's 2009 release of the Standards known as *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (AASL, 2009), a seminal work of 21st

century school librarianship was authored by Delia Neuman (2003) titled “Research in School Library Media for the Next Decade: Polishing the Diamond” (Neuman, 2003). Johnston and Green (2018) call the work “One of the most influential pieces on school library research written in the last twenty years” (p. 1). In Neuman’s work, she presents the visual image of a diamond, with the center representing student learning, and the diamond’s four corners representing the critical areas of school librarianship that should serve as a guide for school library research over the next decade. One of the four identified areas for future research identified by Neuman in 2003 was an examination of the professional role of the school librarian in today’s schools (Neuman, 2003).

In 2018, 15 years after the publication of Neuman’s study, Johnston and Green (2018) revisited Neuman’s call to action as a conceptual framework of their own systematic review study titled “Still Polishing the Diamond: School Library Research over the Last Decade” (Johnston & Green, 2018). Johnston and Green’s (2018) review of Neuman’s second original research question, “What are the roles of the library media specialist in today’s schools?”, provides further justification for this research study. Johnston and Green (2018) note that “The key phrase here is ‘today’s schools,’ ...In the years since Neuman’s article, the role(s) of the school librarian adapted and evolved, and were the subjects of continued debate” (p. 8). Subsequent to Johnston and Green’s 2018 revisiting of Neuman’s seminal 2003 work, K-12 education has experienced through the COVID-19 pandemic a cataclysmic event of disruptive innovation, the rooting of an additional public school instructional setting, K-12 remote, synchronous learning. The role(s) of the public school librarians experiencing this phenomenon in its permanence, no longer in temporary response to crisis, are undefined.

Relevant Literature of Phenomenological Research

Examples of phenomenological research utilized in K-12 education are found in the literature by Reed and Tharp (2020), Kammer and Moreland (2020), Baucum-Manross (2016), Sever et al. (2015), and Velasquez, Graham and Osguthorpe (2013). Reed and Tharp (2020) conducted a phenomenological study of eight school librarians in the southeastern U.S. who elected to take on extra-role behaviors in their work. They sought to explore the questions of “what makes an exemplary school librarian, and how can this behavior be encouraged?” (Reed & Tharp, 2020, p. 49). Results showed that school librarians displayed the highest number of citizenship behaviors in the category of “toward students,” followed by “toward team” and “toward organization” (Reed & Tharp, 2020, p. 53). An important barrier to the display of citizenship behaviors by school librarians in the workplace was cited as lack of perception by classroom teachers as being equals in classroom experience. These perceptions could also affect productive collaboration between the school librarian and classroom teachers, making cohesion of the instructional team difficult. “Lack of respect” was coded within the study as a factor impeding a school librarian’s display of citizenship behaviors (Reed & Tharp, 2020, p. 55).

Kammer and Moreland (2020) also studied school librarians from a phenomenological approach. Their study examined collaborative partnerships between school and public librarians. This study is particularly relevant toward justification of this study because the researchers acknowledge the work of Giorgi (2009) who linked phenomenology and practice: “there is a connection between how we think and how we act” (Kammer & Moreland, 2020, p. 36). By seeking an understanding of the commonalities comprising the essence of an experience, the phenomenological approach can lead to an improvement in practice for all stakeholders.

Baucum-Manross (2016) employed the phenomenological approach to study a group of

middle school teachers' experiencing a new teaching model at the time of the study, blended learning. Baucum-Manross (2016) describes wanting to "give a voice to the teachers" (p. 30). As a researcher, she notes the importance of this work as impacting a broader constituency: "the transitions associated with blended learning affect everyone in the school setting, from district leadership to students" (p. 41). Similar to this study, amplifying the voices of one group can be beneficial to all who work collaboratively in the school setting.

Researchers have also utilized the phenomenological approach to study issues surrounding perceptions of experience within different high school instructional environments, similar to the problem statement addressed in this study. Sever et al. (2015) employed the phenomenological method to examine the interpretations of students in Turkey experiencing six different high school environments such as science schools, fine arts schools, etc. The researchers "inferr[ed] themes...such as how they describe their school, how they differentiate themselves..and what good does school do them" (Sever, 2015, p. 237). Similar to the previously cited studies, this study utilized convenience sampling (Sever, 2015). Similar to this study, Sever et al. (2015) utilized semi-structured interviews for data collection. Velasquez, Graham and Osguthorpe (2013) also examined an alternative high school environment; they sought to describe the concept of 'caring' as experienced by both teachers and students within an online charter high school. Similar to this study, Velasquez et al. (2013) utilized a purposive sample and semistructured interview protocol and identified emergent themes from the process which "examin[ed] each participants' lived experience" (p. 99). This study aims to investigate phenomena under similar conditions to the examples cited, thus, the choice of phenomenology for this study is supported by the relevant literature.

Relevant Literature of Role Studies

The research literature reflects role theory issues of role strain and role conflict that have emerged within K-12 school librarianship in the last decade. As school librarians have evolved into technology leadership roles, distributed leadership has become prevalent practice in schools, multi-work roles are more interconnected and instructional settings have diversified. Deissler et al. (2015) conducted a Georgia study involving 47 school librarians regarding their acquisition of technology skills and noted that school librarians “share[s] many commonalities with instructional technologists” (p. 28). The authors also observed that “many school librarians in Georgia are having to develop skills not provided by their original training in order to keep up with the demands of the profession” (Deissler et al., 2015, p. 28).

Lance and Kachel (2018) cited mid-decade data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) which demonstrated an influx of new K-12 school positions being funded across the country to integrate emerging technologies into school instruction: “The professionals in these new positions carry such titles as digital integrationist, innovation specialist, digital learning specialist, reading interventionist, and technology integration coach” (p.18). Johnston (2015a) previously noted this trend informing technology integration by stating “schools have adapted positions and created new positions” (p. 17). As the profession of school librarianship experiences this role phenomenon collectively, local contexts may provide their own motivators and barriers to accelerating or subsiding these role strains. Further discussion of role conflict and role strain issues between school librarians and other school positions is discussed in the literature review section ‘The School Librarian as Technology Leader.’

Relevant Literature of Disruptive Innovation

The theory of disruptive innovation was proposed within the business world by Clayton Christensen (Christensen, 1997) and has since been adapted to the fields of public education (Christensen, Horn & Johnson, 2011; Duignan, 2020; Rivas-Flores, Cortés Gonzalez, Prados Megias, Valverde Berrococo, Pradena Garcia, & Montes Rodriguez, 2021) and librarianship (Metko, 2018; Adekoya & Adedimeji, 2021; Lewis, 2004; Chad, 2009). Tabbah and Maritz (2019) connect disruption theory to societal workforce effects, noting its “potential to redefine jobs, eliminate others, and create new ones” (p. 18). Concurrently, and specifically applicable to evolving roles within K-12 school librarianship and amidst friction with school instructional technology roles, authors such as Duignan (2020) and Lewis (2004) draw the connection between disruptive forces and human work roles in education and librarianship, respectively, with an emphasis on valuing the experience. In Duignan’s (2020) school leadership book chapter titled “Disruptive Environments Impact People’s Lives and Work,” Duignan stresses the importance of openness with role definition by providing an example from the medical world which is applicable to education. Duignan cites a new CEO of the Cleveland Clinic, who in 2004 shifted role titles campus-wide from ‘doctor’ and ‘nurse’ to the collective term of ‘caregivers,’ thus influencing employees’ perception of their role(s) from employee-focused to patient-focused to emphasize the collaborative nature of their work (Duignan, 2020, p. 16). Duignan (2020) calls for “an emphasis on people – character, authenticity, relationships and interrelationships – instead of on systems, strategies, plans, data” (p. 50). Lewis (2004) examines academic libraries through the lens of disruptive change, and compares “changing roles and relationships” (p. 74) of librarians as a proactive measure to surviving disruption.

Metko (2018) considers the role(s) of librarians through the disruptive innovation model, noting that we embrace evolution in our role(s) or “risk irrelevance” (p. 86). Metko (2018) considers the profession of librarianship as a niche market itself with evolutionary characteristics of a disruptive innovation. Chad (2009) cites the disruptive forces of technology as impacting the role(s) of librarians, noting that the library profession was created from the scarcity of resources, and now that the scarcity no longer exists, we may be the last to see that we face obsolescence due to our role(s). Lewis (2004) also bridges the theories of disruptive innovations in libraries with work roles, advocating that “changing roles and relationships keeps people fresh” (p. 74).

Educational innovation can be sustaining or disruptive (Rivas-Flores et al., 2021; Lewis, 2004; Metko, 2018). Characteristics of SSD’s new instructional remote-synchronous model support the idea that in its inaugural year, the model represents a disruptive educational innovation. The model was created to reinvent education for social distancing, an innovation created within a window of opportunity from social demands as described by Rivas-Flores et al. (2021). Lewis (2004) notes that disruptive innovations require new service models (such as SSD’s remote-synchronous learning model), while sustaining innovations maintain existing organizational dynamics and relationships. SSD’s new instructional model also holds an uncertainty as to whether the model will be successful, another characteristic of a disruptive innovation (Metko, 2018).

The School Librarian as Instructional Partner

The instructional partnership role of the school librarian holds universal recognition and acceptance. While the instructional partnership role is collaborative in its descriptor, in practice, the role is recognized as one in crucial support of classroom instruction (Reed, 2009). The mediums of support are typically instructional resources and the human capital to teach

discernment of their use. The literature of the last decade includes perception studies of principals (Church, 2010; Lupton, 2016), non-librarian stakeholders (Everhart & Mardis, 2012), and teachers (Golden, 2020) of the school librarian's role(s) in instruction, the role(s) of school librarians in educational initiatives such as Response to Instruction (RtI) (Antrim & Robins, 2012), the emergence of the embedded librarianship model in instruction (Hoffman, Beatty, Feng & Lee, 2017), providing research skills to students attending online schools (Beck, 2015; Santos Green, Jones & Burke, 2017), and equity issues during the pandemic learning response (Ibacache, Koob & Vance, 2020; Kammer & Burress, 2020).

Empirical studies by Church (2010), Lupton (2016), Everhart and Mardis (2012), and Golden (2020) examined stakeholder perception by key groups who collaborate with school librarians. Church (2010) examined principals' perceptions of the school librarian's instructional role. Church conducted a large-scale, quantitative study within the state of Virginia that gauged principals' perceptions of school librarians as teachers, instructional partners, and initiators of collaboration. Church's data revealed mixed results. While principals overwhelmingly indicated that they viewed media specialists as teachers (80%+) as well as instructional leaders who should serve on the school improvement team (94%), only 44% indicated that school librarians should have access to student assessment data (Church, 2010). Mixed results from this study support the assertion that the local needs of a school along with the dynamic of the principal's personal perception of the school librarian strongly influences the distributed leadership decisions of the role.

Lupton's (2016) qualitative study identified role conflict and role strain in examining principals' perceptions of the school librarian's role in Queensland, Australia. Lupton cites a local inquiry into a school librarian shortage that revealed "The Australian Senate Inquiry found

that the role of the teacher-librarian has been problematic” (Lupton, 2016, p. 49), while citing discrepancies in school librarians’ job title, qualifications, and duties. The findings align with the mixed results of Church (2010). In this study, Lupton (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews of nine principals and notes that “each of the nine principals viewed the role of the teacher-librarian (TL) quite differently” (p. 52), “it was the person who made the role valuable, not the role per se” (p. 55), and “the role of the teacher-librarian has expanded from the traditional role” (p. 57). The two areas identified as having the greatest impact on the expansion of the position were in the areas of technology and pedagogical leadership. Lupton (2016) also makes note of the emphasis on personal dynamics: “the principal’s perception of the role...is crucial to the way that the school library and teacher-librarian is supported (or not) in the school” (p. 50) and “research into the role is highly dependent on the jurisdiction” (p. 49).

In Everhart and Mardis’ (2012) study in Pennsylvania, focus group interviews were conducted with non-librarian stakeholders of school library programs to understand perceptions held by these groups. This project was known as *Supporting the Infrastructure Needs of 21st Century School Library Programs*, or casually, the Pennsylvania School Library Project (Everhart & Mardis, 2014). Results of four successive focus groups sessions were that the themes of the correlation between the school librarian’s role and student achievement resonated with participants (Everhart & Mardis, 2014), as did budget cuts, personnel cuts, and inconsistencies among school library resources. “Surprise and dismay” (p. 8) were expressed by participants regarding personnel cuts, in particular, and the use of parent volunteers or clerical staff in the place of school librarians. Role ambiguity is demonstrated between the perceived emphasis on student achievement found in Everhart and Mardis’ (2014) study, and Church’s

(2010) findings that only a minority of principals believed that school librarians should have access to student achievement data.

Golden (2020) conducted a mixed-methods perception study with teachers from Massachusetts regarding their attitudes towards school library use for classroom-assigned research projects. Teacher-participants were included who assigned classroom research projects to their students. Participants were asked about topics such as requiring the use of library resources by their students, necessity of utilizing the library's resources, and obstacles students might face in either using the library or consulting the school librarian in the research process (Golden, 2020). Overall, results were favorable to the perception of the school librarian as a valuable resource to facilitate the research process. However, a range of concerns were expressed by teachers, such as: the library is viewed by students as a place for punishment, that some students experience "library anxiety" regarding usage of resources, and the school librarian's demeanor can serve as a deterrent (Golden, 2020). These findings directly align with Lupton (2016), in that the individual stakeholder's personal interaction with their school's librarian largely seems to inform the role in a particular workplace.

New instructional models, and librarians' role(s) in relationship to them, are found in the literature in empirical studies by Antrim and Robins (2012) and Hoffman et al. (2017). Antrim and Robins (2012) conducted a mixed methods study to gauge school librarians' involvement with implementing Response to Instruction (RtI) at their respective school sites. RtI is a three-tiered instructional model which applies interventions based on student learning needs. RtI met the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Antrim & Robins, 2012) and remains a successful intervention strategy in public schools even though NCLB ended in 2015. Results of Antrim and Robins' study indicated that 38% of school librarians were not

involved in RtI implementation at all, but of the 62% who were involved, roles differed from the traditional ones of school librarians (such as locating resources for students and reader's advisory), to non-traditional roles such as assisting with testing and data entry (Antrim & Robins, 2012). One participant indicated that "because RtI placed emphasis on literacy, increased value was placed on the librarian's position in her school" (Antrim & Robins, 2012, p. 11). This study reinforces the longstanding perception of school librarian as instructional partner to teachers, regardless of tasks assigned.

Hoffman et al. (2017) conducted a case study exploring an emerging model of collaborative librarianship known as embedded librarianship. The concept of 'embedded librarianship' appears as an emerging role in the years preceding the pandemic when blended and online learning environments proliferated. Examples of embedded librarianship roles are "services includ[ing] instructional materials such as pathfinders and tutorials, research assistance, information literacy modules, and leadership for design of library support" (Boyer & Kelly, 2014, p. 366). Elbasri (2018) states "the school librarian has an increasingly important role to play in using, facilitating, and embedding this type of [information technology] learning within the school library and in collaboration with teachers" (para. 5).

Hoffman et al. (2017) implemented an empirical pilot study of an embedded librarianship approach at the university level considered "novel" (Hoffman et al., 2017, p. 211, 219) because the librarians not only collaborated with fellow faculty members, but were involved in an "expanded role" (p. 212), an "ideal" model of "course design, content, pedagogy and student assessment" (p. 214). As a part of a collaborative team, the university librarians developed an original course titled *Science, Technology and Society*, adjusted instruction throughout the semester to meet the students' evolving needs, gained experience in teaching techniques such as

scaffolding and flipped classrooms, and participated in course grading and assessment of students' work. Compilation of the case study results were from two sources: librarians' reflections shared and discussed throughout the pilot study, and student data of 33 surveys returned at the end of the course, or a 70% student response rate. Overall, the collective data was positive, with both librarians and students indicating value gained from the experience. The librarians felt as though they better met their students' research needs, and the students felt as though novel approaches such as pre-tests from the librarians helped adjust instruction accordingly. The greatest barrier cited by the librarians was the time-intensity of the experience. A study such as this is groundbreaking because it reveals the capacity of the profession at all levels, and aligns to innovation in instructional models much like the innovative setting of this study. This study also aligns to the position of Lupton (2016), who similarly notes that the role(s) of librarians have expanded beyond traditional roles.

Studies by Beck (2015) and Santos Green et al. (2017) have examined the role of school librarians in fully online schools, the predecessor to the new instructional setting introduced in this study, a remote synchronous setting. While historically students enrolled in part-time virtual school coursework have dominated K-12 online schooling, a shift occurred to fully online and blended school settings and practices (Beck, 2015). Santos Green et al. (2017) conducted a nationwide mixed-methods survey examining the ways that library preparation programs prepare graduates to construct digital environments for fully online K-12 students and found that "Results indicate that preparation of future school librarians for the design and delivery of online instruction to K-12 students is not yet seen as an integral component of these graduate programs" (p. 1). The same authors cite one of their previous studies from 2014 which surveyed 100 school librarians in Georgia and Texas and found that 69% received little or no training for instructional

design with fully online environments (Santos Green et al., 2017). Beck (2015) notes that “the role and responsibilities of the school librarian...continues to be undefined in this [cyber and virtual school] setting” (p. 79) and that “no empirical research was found on the school librarian’s role and responsibilities in a fully online school” (p. 77). Boyer and Kelly (2014) state that “there does not exist a significant body of research specifically related to K-12 online school libraries” (p. 365).

Beck (2015) used purposive sampling in a study to select two principals to interview regarding school librarianship for fully virtual schools. Findings of Beck (2015) were that in fully virtual schools, ALA-designated school librarian responsibilities such as inquiry-based literacy instruction were delegated to teachers through curriculum teams or professional learning communities, and that cyber schools relied heavily on local public libraries facing their own budget issues. Concurring with Santos Green et al. (2017), Beck states that “school librarian preparation programs should consider the potential difference in skill sets needed for such positions” (Beck, 2015, p. 82).

Empirical studies also examined patron technology equities and appropriate technology usage by school librarians during the transition to remote teaching during the pandemic response (Ibacache et al., 2020; Kammer & Burrell, 2020). Ibacache et al. (2020) conducted a study among academic librarians regarding usage of technology tools during the pandemic, distinguishing between platforms such as Zoom that delivered content, and student engagement tools such as Padlet. This study utilized a methodology of grounded theory (Ibacache et al., 2020). Findings were that usage of LibGuides and Zoom were most popular, while the second question on tools for student engagement yielded favorability towards Google tools such as Forms, Drive, and Classroom (Ibacache et al., 2020). Of particular note was consideration of

bandwidth consumption as one of equity, with the suggestion advanced that allowance of chat box usage advances digital equity, since webcam requirements increase bandwidth (Ibacache et al., 2020).

Kammer and Burrell (2020) examined lines of inquiry made by school librarians once the transition to pandemic learning began. They examined school librarians' usage of social media networks to ascertain answers to questions regarding appropriate remote teaching practices. The Facebook group LM-Net was utilized for the study (Kammer & Burrell, 2020). The majority of questions concerned traditional roles of school librarians in a new setting - 47% concerned providing remote library instruction, 35% concerned reading engagement in the remote learning environment, and 18% of the questions concerned copyright (Kammer & Burrell, 2020). An example was the copyright compliance of "a read-aloud on Facebook live" (Kammer & Burrell, 2020, p. 205). Each of these studies upholds traditional roles of school librarians in dynamic environments, fulfilling a critical need of 21st century teaching and learning.

The prevailing literature of the school librarian as an instructional partner to teachers concerns perception studies, a valuable component to the understanding of role(s). The studies support the need for school librarians to be cognizant of areas of contention, such as the discrepancy between the critical role in supporting instruction and inclusion in receipt of assessment data. As schools engage in strategic planning to improve upon and build new instructional processes, they will consider the contributions that they perceive school librarians can make. Perception studies emerging from pandemic-era hybrid instruction should significantly inform the literature moving forward, as many of the era's instructional initiatives and emergent roles have evolved into permanence.

The School Librarian as Technology Leader

The school librarian position has transitioned into a technology leadership role in conjunction with the 21st-century pedagogical shift to instructional technology integration and blended learning. Johnston (2012) states that “21st-century learning has necessitated this evolution of the school librarian and presents opportunities for leadership” (p. 3). Baker, Decman, and Willis (2020) acknowledge in their study that changes to instruction from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic have transformed pedagogy and presented a need for “an expanded definition of instructional leadership” (p. 1) and “A campus vision...including the school librarian...is necessary to support teachers and students throughout innovation adoption” (p. 2). As the position of the school-level instructional technology specialist emerged beginning in the late 1990s (Johnston, 2015a) and proliferated in the years after, role ambiguity (Johnston, 2012) and role conflict between the instructional technology specialist and the school library media specialist (the official title prior to 2009) (Johnston, 2015a) was experienced both by holders of both positions as well as school principals (Johnston, 2015a). By 2009, the AASL Standards of that year identified the leadership role of school librarians for the first time (AASL, 2009) but did not acknowledge the growing role of instructional technology specialists other than in passive acknowledgement of school librarians’ service on technology committees at the school and district level (AASL, 2009). As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle coined the term “the dog that didn’t bark,” this omission is notable, particularly when the following year, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) released a statement titled *The Role of School Librarians in Promoting the Use of Educational Technologies* (2010). With this statement, ISTE attempted to clarify the two roles, although persisting was a “mixed message” (Johnston, 2015a, p. 19). In 2011, Dotson and Jones challenged school librarians to “confront the evolving changes” with an

analogy between the profession and “the doomed fishing boat, the Andrea Gail, in Junger’s *The Perfect Storm*” (Dotson & Jones, 2011, p. 78). By the end of the decade, Lewis’s (2019) study of school librarians and instructional coaches cited “role confusion” between the two roles (p. 20) and concurred with Johnston (2015a) in noting that “the roles of an instructional coach and teacher librarian appear similar in nature” (Lewis, 2019, p. 16). The literature of school librarian leadership notes a competitive relationship between the school librarian and other coaching positions for technology leadership roles, coupled with rallying cries for “radical change” (Wine, 2016, p. 207).

The literature on the dynamics between school librarians and other professional roles includes empirical studies by Elkins (2018), Johnston (2012, 2015a), Lewis (2019), and Baker et al. (2020). Elkins (2018) conducted a qualitative study to examine where gaps existed between school librarians’ job descriptions in Florida compared to the 2009 professional standards published by AASL (AASL, 2009), the first year AASL identified school leadership as a distinct role for school librarians. The author notes that “the differences...may be a source of role ambiguity, conflict...for school librarians” (Elkins, 2018, p. 87) as well as a research gap: “not...well examined are the differences in performance responsibilities between documentary sources like professional standards and job descriptions” (p. 90). In Elkins’ study (2018), he notes some of the reasons why school librarians’ roles have evolved, such as technology implementation, increasing accountability mandates, and high-stakes testing.

Elkins (2018) found that out of 67 school districts in Florida, only 57 districts had a job description for the school librarian. In examining alignment between Florida job descriptions and AASL standards, the greatest alignment was evident in the school librarian roles of Instructional Partner, Program Administrator, and Information Specialist (Elkins, 2018). The least alignment

was in the role of school librarian as Leader, “with just 50% of districts having at least one performance responsibility related to the Leader role” (p. 95). This oversight is alarming, as Wine (2016) notes that school librarians’ leadership roles are multidimensional and aligned to standards of technology leadership.

Johnston (2012, 2015a) conducted a study of barriers and enablers to school librarians’ serving as technology leaders in schools, noting that “this role is one that has been ignored in the research arena...leading to uncertainty concerning how school librarians enact this role in practice” (Johnston, 2015a, p. 17). Johnston (2015a) specifically examined the findings of school librarians who indicated the peer position of an instructional technology specialist as serving as a barrier or enabler to their own technology leadership role. As these complimentary positions have evolved, “overlap, confusion, and misunderstanding of these two roles have developed” (Johnston, 2015a, p. 20). Johnston’s (2015a) research analyzed open-ended responses provided from the administration of the *School Library Media Specialist and Technology Integration Survey* (2009) through the process of content analysis. Participants were National Board Certified school librarians serving at all educational levels across the United States, of which 295 returned usable responses.

In this study, school librarians identified a supportive principal as the greatest enabler to enacting a technology leadership role (Johnston, 2012). Studies by Church (2010) and Lupton (2016) support the influence of the principal’s perception on the school librarian’s role, as identified in this study. Identified second as an enabler was school librarians’ experiencing positive relationships with fellow teachers (Johnston, 2012). Johnston (2012) noted that the barrier cited most frequently in the study involved institutional structure, such as staffing, funding, and “norms and expectations that can form aspects of school climate that influence roles

and opportunities in efforts to take part in leadership” (p. 17). Another frequently cited barrier to leadership enactment by school librarians was a competitive relationship with the school’s instructional technology specialist (Johnston, 2012; Johnston, 2015a; Wine, 2016). Perceived role ambiguity as experienced by school librarians with their principal and district leadership was also identified as a barrier to their role (Johnston, 2012). It is worth noting that an emergent role was identified from this study; some respondents served in a dual role as both the school librarian and instructional technology specialist and identified the dual role as an enabler to their leadership capability (Johnston, 2012). The author notes that “Research that examines the roles of the school librarian, the instructional technologist, and/or school librarians serving in a dual role may provide important insights to support future role designations” (Johnston, 2012, p. 26). As a practicing school librarian serving in a dual role, this study aims to contribute to this call for research.

Lewis (2019) conducted a case study of California school administrators which examined the choices made in assigning instructional leadership support roles to either their school librarian or instructional coach. Lewis’ findings support the findings of Lupton (2016) and Church (2010), noting the importance of the professional relationship between the principal and school librarian as most closely impacting instructional leadership decisions: “Teacher librarians currently employed in schools need to be cognizant that an administrator’s view of the teacher librarian position will be primarily shaped by his or her experience with them” (Lewis, 2019, p. 29).

Baker et al. (2020) conducted a large-scale quantitative study of 275 school administrators to examine their perceptions of school librarians’ roles in times of change. The results indicate that only 40% of school administrators consider the roles of school librarians to

be “significant” or “full” in regards to technology planning and instructional leadership (Baker et al., 2020, p. 14). School administrators in this study embrace librarians’ traditional roles as advocates for their own programs, however, at 66% support (Baker et al., 2020). As the authors recognize an expanded definition of instructional leadership in times of change, the data reveals that school librarians must effectively evolve and advocate for technology leadership and instructional leadership role(s). The findings toward traditional role(s) of school librarians reinforces the nature of the competitive relationships in the workplace as librarians seek expected technology leadership role(s).

Role strain issues regarding the school librarian position, addressed in each of these empirical studies published in the decade following AASL’s 2009 call for school librarians to assume technology leadership roles, reveal competing interests impacting fulfillment of the technology leadership charge. The diversification of instructional settings through technology utilization due to the pandemic will further emphasize the need for school librarians to understand their capabilities as roles evolve. School librarians must navigate the next decade as early adopters and innovators in order to cement their technology leadership role(s) within collaborative instructional leadership teams of which they have an increasing role (Baker et al., 2020).

The School Librarian as Information Literacy Specialist

Much like the overlapping role(s) within school librarianship and between school librarians and fellow technology leaders, so is the definition of information literacy. Fontichiaro and Johnston (2020) observe that “Media literacy, news literacy, and information literacy have overlapping definitions, and the synergies far outweigh the distinctions” (p. 76). Cherinet (2018) advances multiple skills required for school librarian role(s) under the umbrella term of

“transliteracy” (p. 95), to include information literacy, digital literacy, and communications competencies. Information literacy “has long been one of the major roles of school librarians” (Phillips & Anderson, 2020, p. 385), but technology has exponentially increased accepted definitions and resulting critique of what constitutes news, as an example of new competencies informing the literature (Farmer, 2019). Additionally, the current literature acknowledges the measurable influence of librarians’ instruction of information literacy from the approach of disruptive innovation in an empirical study by Adekoya and Adedimeji (2021). Further competencies emerging within information literacy instruction in the literature are the realized importance of raw data in teaching the consumption of information (search engine algorithms come to mind) (Fontichiaro & Johnston, 2020) and in teaching the distinction of impartial content from similarly packaged sponsored content (Farmer, 2019). The recent literature covers the role(s) of the school librarian as an information literacy specialist in empirical studies by Reed and Oslund (2018), Phillips and Lee (2019), Crary (2019), Farmer (2019), Phillips and Anderson (2020), Fontichiaro and Johnston (2020), and Adekoya and Adedimeji (2021).

The federal legislation known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 followed the landmark 2001 legislation of No Child Left Behind. Reed and Oslund (2018) note that “one of [ESSA’s] most important components was the inclusion of school librarians on the ‘literacy instruction team’ via Section 2224 of the legislation” (p. 2). AASL concurred with the inclusion of information literacy as a leadership role of the school librarian in their 2018 position statement on strategic leadership (AASL, 2018b). Reed and Oslund’s study examined school librarians’ preparation to teach students higher level literacy strategies, as well as librarians’ perceptions regarding this enhanced role in literacy instruction (Reed & Oslund, 2018). The mixed methods study was conducted among school librarians in the state of Tennessee. Findings

revealed that although literacy instruction was included in federal mandates, school librarians indicated a lack of confidence in fulfilling this role, perhaps due to emerging competencies, and due to their university preparation indicated that additional, targeted professional development would be beneficial (Reed & Oslund, 2018). Phillips and Anderson (2020) reported similar hesitations among school librarians, indicating that “not only were librarians lacking in resources and other materials they could draw upon [for teaching information literacy]” but they “expressed a need for continuing education and/or professional development on digital citizenship and overarching digital literacy” (pp. 387-388).

Phillips and Anderson (2020) conducted two studies involving digital literacy education, one including school librarians and another including students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), both regarding perceptions of how digital literacy education is met for teenagers with ASD. The American Library Association (ALA) upholds equitable access for all persons as a core value of the profession across all types of library service, and is expressly stated as such within the Code of Ethics: “We provide equitable service policies...We affirm the inherent dignity and rights of every person” (ALA, 2021). Findings of the dual studies were that teenagers with ASD are a rich source of feedback for producing digital citizenship and information literacy material, and that they held a heightened awareness of cyberbullying and surrounding issues (Phillips & Anderson, 2020). As Reed and Oslund (2018) and Phillips and Anderson (2020) both point out, school librarians seek more resources of both training and materials to fulfill this role of teaching new information literacy competencies, while recognizing the critical need of the role.

In a mixed methods study of digital citizenship instruction, Phillips and Lee (2019) examined a mandate from the Utah State Legislature known as the “Safe Technology Utilization

and Digital Citizenship in Public Schools” Bill. The Bill mandated that Utah public schools provide digital citizenship instruction to K-12 students. Digital citizenship is considered a component of information literacy, and is itself an expected school librarian role found throughout school librarians’ professional standards (Abercrombie, 2016). However, the Bill did not address a curriculum, budget, instructional leader, or evaluation system (Phillips & Lee, 2019). The researchers note that “school librarians’ roles and responsibilities are diverse and dependent on the schools in which they are working” (p. 3). The researchers also note that as of May, 2018, Utah employed approximately 228 school librarians serving 880 K-12 schools, and 134 participated in this study’s survey research (Phillips & Lee, 2019).

Findings of the Phillips and Lee study were that school librarians strongly felt as though they should have a primary role in providing digital citizenship instruction, a component of transliteracy (Cherinet, 2018), but 66.2% indicated that this instruction was a team effort alongside teachers (Phillips & Lee, 2019). Participants expressed a desire for more knowledge about the curriculum already in place in classrooms, suggesting a “murky area” (p. 10). School librarians expressed a desire for more collaboration opportunities within one’s school, not only with teachers but with technology coaches and administrators, for example. School librarians also sought administrative support in the form of an updated curriculum (57% of respondents) and integration of teaching digital citizenship skills throughout the school’s programming; for example, instruction occurring not only in the school library but in computer science class and health class (Phillips & Lee, 2019).

As a researcher, a problem is evident among the literature. Phillips and Anderson (2020) cite Phillips and Lee (2019) in calling for enhanced digital citizenship and digital literacy instructional options to be presented in a format for “one-shot instruction or programming [as is]

taking place in libraries” (Phillips & Anderson, 2020, p. 388), noting that most of the materials are geared toward classroom teachers with a long-term integrated instructional approach. The literature of school librarianship is moving toward the practice of ‘embedded librarianship,’ a concept which is the opposite of one-stop shop approaches. While the profession is evolving away from the idea of library instruction as a one-stop shop (Metko, 2018; Hoffman et al., 2016), Phillips and Lee (2019) are seemingly calling for new information literacy competencies to be packaged for the old paradigm. Contrarily, Fontichairo and Johnston (2020) call for “data literacy [to] be embedded in information literacy instruction” (p. 76) and “a cross-disciplinary approach that embeds data education within the context of existing disciplines is both preferable and practical” (p. 78). In Fontichairo and Johnston’s (2020) quantitative study, they also call for more training for school librarians in new information literacy competencies, noting that “they first need new domain knowledge” (p. 75).

Further quantitative studies solidifying librarians’ role(s) in teaching information literacy were conducted by Crary (2019), Adekoya and Adedimeji (2021), and Farmer (2019), with areas of concern evident. Crary (2019) employed a mixed-methods methodology in her study of information literacy instruction, including classroom teachers alongside school librarians in her data collection. Although Crary’s study does not specifically introduce role conflict or role strain by name in her framework, these applicable theories are potential issues which classroom teachers and school librarians would be navigating when considering teaching of the new literacies in diverse instructional settings. Crary found, through quantitative inquiry of classroom teachers and qualitative inquiry of school librarians, that inconsistencies persisted regarding information literacy instruction. For example, classroom teachers were more open to collaboration with school librarians in teaching students information literacy skills when they

initiated the collaboration (87.2%), as opposed to school librarians initiating the collaboration (84.9%) (Crary, 2019). Further, by a difference of 83.7% to 74.4%, classroom teachers supported collaborating with school librarians to teach information literacy skills themselves versus their willingness to collaborate with school librarians to facilitate the school librarians' teaching of these skills (Crary, 2019). These findings maintain that classroom teachers are more comfortable with school librarians in a supporting role, but not necessarily a collaborative, co-teaching role, which may be an area of concern to school librarians as role(s) continue to evolve.

Adekoya and Adedimeji (2021) conducted a quantitative research study that also acknowledges tensions that are influencing the role of information literacy instruction by librarians. The researchers utilize the approach of disruptive innovation theory in examining academic librarians' service delivery models and information dissemination, proposing that "there is massive deployment of disruptive innovations in circulation, cataloguing and classification and teaching of information literacy" (Adekoya & Adedimeji, 2021, p. 12). Utilizing a methodology of descriptive survey research, the researchers included 167 academic librarians and para-professionals in Nigeria, of which 121 questionnaires were returned. The researchers found that in regards to the teaching of information literacy, the service model was above the mean in the extent to which disruptive innovations influenced the role, with only circulation and cataloguing more strongly impacted (Adekoya & Adedimeji, 2021).

Farmer's (2019) quantitative study of 41 California school librarians regarding implementation of an emerging news literacy curriculum revealed a need for school librarians to lead this effort within their schools. A gap exists in clarifying the role(s) between school librarians and classroom teachers in regards to teaching new competencies. Farmer (2019) observed that "news literacy...is only addressed in the California language arts framework in a

couple of sample units” (p. 8), implying that it is not addressed in the school library standards at all, and that only one case was known among the respondents where a classroom teacher implemented a news literacy curriculum (Farmer, 2019). Farmer (2019) noted that “school librarians seem to spearhead such efforts, if anyone does at all” (p. 9). As the definition of information literacy is reflected in the literature to encompass new skills and competencies known as transliteracy, suggesting the introduction of role stressors such as role ambiguity and disruptive innovation, school librarians are empowered to reflect upon, define, and advocate for their instructional role(s) moving forward. If K-12 school librarians do not take proactive measures in times of evolutionary change, their role(s) are at risk of obsolescence (Chad, 2009) or redundancy (Adekoya & Adedimeji, 2021).

The School Librarian in Emerging Roles

The theme of emerging roles for school librarians and calls for transformation within the profession are prevalent in the literature. Empirical studies presenting new pedagogical practices and/or emerging roles for librarians are presented by Bishop (2021), Cherinet (2018), Soulen and Wine (2018), Hughes-Hassell and Stivers (2015) and Cooke (2019). Bishop (2021) conducted a mixed methods research study of middle school teacher practices within the context of a new paradigm, “pandemic pedagogy” (p. 4). This study is representative of the literature emerging from the pandemic in regards to the evolution of instructional models. Asserting that “disruption may also stimulate innovation” (Bishop, 2021, p. 1), Bishop proposed that among the 1.6 billion students worldwide impacted by changes to teaching and learning, development of innovative pedagogical approaches varies widely. Through narrative survey responses submitted between late May and late June, 2020, 332 teachers participated in the study. Results from the open coding of themes revealed an emphasis on building personal relationships with students and their

families, adapting instruction to individual student needs, permitting student-directed learning, and the leveraging of technology for new applications. A challenge revealed in the research is that educational inequities are exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. These inequities that influence teachers' pedagogy must also be considerations within the research that emerges from the evolution of school librarians' roles within the pandemic.

Cherinet (2018) conducted a perception study to explore the future roles of librarians. The study involved 60 academic librarians selected by purposive sampling, and over 50 university students. The study included the concepts of 'roles' and 'skills' as both influencing librarians' professional roles. The study is innovative in that not only were emerging hard skills considered such as new technical knowledge and embedded librarianship, but emerging soft skills were introduced from the results as required skills of future librarians. Those soft skills include innovation skills, cultural intelligence and diversity skills, negotiation skills, and quite interestingly, passion. The authors make an interesting observation that academic librarians are currently serving multiple generations, "X", "Y," and "Z," (Cherinet, 2017, p. 98) and must be adaptable according to the patron served. This concept is not far removed from the training within K-12 librarianship; K-12 librarians earn a single certification but serve vastly different roles within their three respective school levels. The emphasis on the patron's personal dynamics, and the librarian's relationship to the patron, aligns with the later findings of Bishop regarding building personal relationships with students/patrons (2021) as an emphasis emerging from the pandemic.

A case study conducted by Soulen and Wine (2018) identifies a new role for school librarians as the mentoring of new K-12 teachers. Their framework proposes that resilience is a critical skill influenced by the role of mentoring, and one that ultimately impacts student

achievement through teacher retention. The researchers propose the new role of teacher mentoring as the next iteration of the existing role of collaborative partnerships between school librarians and teachers. A focus group and interviews were conducted to seek “the contributions that school librarians made in building resilience of new and beginning teachers” and to “define the role of school librarians” (Soulén & Wine, 2018, p. 83). Results indicated that K-12 school librarians could build teachers’ capacity for resilience by promoting perseverance, displaying empathy, and providing professional nourishment and critical support to new teachers in the first days of school. This study supports the results from Cherinet (2018) in identifying behavioral “soft skills” as critical to shaping expected school librarian roles of the future. The study also supports the findings of Bishop (2021) emphasizing relationship-building and adapting to the personal needs of students as pandemic pedagogy is navigated, such as in the setting of this study.

Prior to Cherinet’s 2017 study recognizing cultural intelligence and diversity skills, an earlier study by Hughes-Hassell and Stivers (2015) proposed an integration of culturally relevant pedagogical practices into school librarians’ professional practices. The researchers note that as of 2012, the majority of school and public librarians in the United States were white women, whereas by 2015 “youth of colour...make up the majority of students attending American public schools” (Hughes-Hassell & Stivers, 2015, p. 121). The qualitative study investigated cultural competence as a key skill impacting the practicing role(s) of both school and public youth services librarians, citing the correlation between culturally relevant pedagogy and student achievement (Hughes-Hassell & Stivers, 2015). Supporting the expansion of the term ‘literacy’ to ‘transliteracy’ by Cherinet (2018), Hughes-Hassell and Stivers (2015) earlier propose “understanding of the term ‘literacy’ [to] include[e] cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives”

(Hughes-Hassell & Stivers, 2015, p. 124). Findings of the qualitative study from 87 participants, the majority of whom were white, were that only 17% specifically raised cultural competence in their responses. Higher percentages of responses, however, promoted ideas such as ‘empowering youth’ and overcoming ‘the digital divide,’ and encouraging results were the repeated mention of skills such as “empathy, warmth, caring...accepting...willingness to advocate” (Hughes-Hassell, 2015, p. 132). The results support the studies by Bishop (2021), and Soulen and Wine (2018), that for school librarians to fully realize their emerging role(s) and remain relevant the building of personal relationships must be inherent to school library practices at all levels.

Cooke (2019) conducted a narrative inquiry study within the field of library science. Cooke (2019) utilized autoethnography to tell her story of professional growth from the perspective of a minority and female library and information science faculty member of a university. She describes her journey toward becoming a radical teacher toward radical pedagogies, applying the meaning of the word ‘radical’ to her context as the “fundamental, or source of something” (Cooke, 2019, p. 120). Cooke (2019) proposes that before we can focus on student learning, teachers need to look within and question “Who are *we* as learners? Who are *we* as teachers? How do *we* interact with our content?” (p. 120).

Cooke (2019) applied this radical pedagogy to her library and information science teaching curriculum. A “content reboot” (Cooke, 2019, p. 122) occurred through the lenses of “radical hospitality” (p. 124), “radical love” (p. 125), and a “radical honesty and candor” (p. 126), all of which led to a “humanizing pedagogy” (p. 127). Parallels are recognizable between Cooke’s (2019) development of a humanizing pedagogy for library and information science and the ‘pandemic pedagogy’ proposed by Bishop (2021). Cooke (2019) describes how her process of “critical self-reflection” led her to transform her teaching practices by “adding more context

and personal stories to [her] curriculum,” “prais[ing] her students more and thank[ing] them for taking risks in the classroom” and “shar[ing] more of myself in class” (Cooke, 2019, p. 129).

The study by Cooke (2019) supports qualitative studies within the library and information science profession in two ways: first, the study validates the emotional side of school librarians’ work, and second, it serves as an example of the types of stories that school librarians have to tell. Through Cooke’s journey, she encourages others to tell their own stories: “libraries and librarians need to be new storytellers and be proactive in telling the real stories of the learning, care and radical hospitality that happen in libraries every day” (Cooke, 2019, p. 120).

As learning environments expand from the pandemic into new instructional settings, and the literature pre-pandemic began to reflect a greater emphasis on soft skills, cultural responsiveness and humanizing pedagogies that have solidified, school librarians must reflect on how their role(s) are evolving. By reflecting upon and understanding emergent roles, such as in the methodology of phenomenology, school librarians may better process issues of role strain that may develop within new instructional settings and pedagogical practices. School librarians who understand their role(s), and can therefore perform their duties effectively, are at less risk of redundancy or obsolescence in favor of other school personnel who are also evolving to meet their school community’s critical needs.

Summary and Implications of Literature Review

This literature review synthesizes the works of the active research field in the examination of the evolving role(s) of the school librarian in today’s schools. The pandemic response has diversified K-12 instructional settings around the world, while the literature supports that important changes influencing school librarianship were underway prior to the pandemic, such as an expanding definition of information literacy, the proliferation of new

instructional positions in K-12 schools, and a greater emphasis on refining soft skills and applying humanizing pedagogies. Throughout this rapid change of the last decade, school librarians have experienced professional tensions that are widely discussed among school librarians' cultural group, and the research literature acknowledges the practicality of school librarians' experience in navigating role relationships with administrators, teachers, and new instructional positions. School librarianship has also pivoted toward the field of instructional technology, as reflected in the literature of role strain issues concerning role redundancy and overlap.

Examining prevalent themes from the research literature incurs overlap, as well. For example, a K-12 information literacy specialist would likely hold inherent qualities of a technology leader. Therefore, aligning the most important themes of this literature review to the evolving, decennial AASL Standards of the past 25 years (1988, 1998, 2009, 2018) provided a useful guide that the school librarianship community recognizes. As the school librarianship community experienced a collective crisis response during the pandemic and continues to navigate new instructional settings that have often moved to permanency as a disruptive innovation, the Standards have not yet addressed this response. How school librarians are processing these changes, applying and communicating these changes is worthy of further research.

The methodology of phenomenology, if applied in more research studies of school librarians, would provide much needed insight into the current state of the profession. School librarians are in many cases on their own, and charting new waters. Without the Standards addressing new tensions within the profession, school librarians' experiences are personal and worthy of investigation. These topics are also of importance to all K-12 stakeholders because of

the connectivity among positions, returning to the analogy of the jungle gym. Examining perceptions of school librarians facilitates understanding of the collective nature with which critical decisions are made for emerging instructional models of the 21st century and most substantially, of the pandemic era.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Question

The purpose of this phenomenological research study is to explore multi-role perceptions, experiences, and responses as they evolve for school librarians from the disruptive diversification of instructional settings, and related impacts to those multi-role perceptions such as role conflict and/or role strain. The overarching research question is aligned to the purposes of phenomenological research as suggested by Moustakas (1994) to describe: “What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?” and “What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of this phenomenon?” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61).

The overarching question for this study is:

RQ: What does it mean to be a school librarian during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The sub-questions for this study are:

Q1: As instructional settings diversify within a 1:1 school district, how, if at all, do K-12 school librarians experience their roles evolving and/or proliferating?

Q2: As instructional settings diversify within a 1:1 school district, how, if at all, have school librarians experienced role conflict and/or role strain?

Q3: How, if at all, do school librarians respond to multi-role work environments to ensure continued success in their professional role(s)?

Chapter 3, Methodology, outlines the approach to the study that aims to answer the study’s overarching research question and sub-questions. The chapter includes a description of the researcher’s worldview and connection to the study, a description and justification of the research design of the study, a defense of the value of the methodology, a description of the research setting, an explanation of participant recruitment and sampling procedures, and an

explanation of site access for participant interviews. In addition, the chapter addresses instrumentation (reliability and validity), data collection and analysis procedures, support for the validity of interpretation, limitations and delimitations of the study, and ethical considerations.

Worldview

As a researcher in this study who is proposing a phenomenological approach, I believe that the nature of knowledge, or epistemological tenet, is constructed rather than transferred or acquired (Antonenko, 2014). Further, as a practicing school librarian, I “seek understanding of the world in which [I] live and work” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Therefore, the paradigm that best fits the assumptions of this research study is interpretivism within a worldview of social constructivism, supported by the ontological and axiological positions of the researcher. Interpretivism holds that the nature of reality is subjective and constructed. Truth itself is interpreted by the one asking questions and seeking understanding of the world.

The ontological tenet of this study, or nature of reality, is rooted in sociocultural theory. Wilson and Peterson (2006) note that “knowledge and learning exist in the interactions between individuals and the contexts in which they live, in the activities we participate in. Thus, “communities of practice” or “learning communities” become critical to learning” (p. 5). The axiological tenet, or nature of ethical behavior, is rooted in the concept of “community rapport” (Mertens, 2010, p. 11) which is reflected in the nature of my evolving professional practice as a school librarian and thus sparked my interest in the research area. In describing my relationship to the participants, settings, and influences that have accelerated interest in the area of research, I am authentic in my descriptions.

Role of the Researcher

As a high school librarian of 24 years serving in three southeastern states, and as the daughter of a high school librarian of 40 years spanning from 1964-2004, I have been both a witness and a career participant in the cycle of disruptions and subsequent reactions by AASL in sustaining relevancy for school librarianship in K-12 education. In addition to my present position as a full-time school librarian managing a modern Learning Commons at Baldwin High School (BHS) [pseudonym], one of ten comprehensive high schools in Summit School District (SSD) [pseudonym], I concurrently serve in other multi-roles. I serve as an adjunct teacher in a blended setting for SSD's full-time blended and virtual learning academy, Apex Academy [pseudonym], as well as serve as an *expanded on-site facilitator* managing a distance-learning program within the Learning Commons of BHS as defined in the literature by de la Varre, Keane, and Irvin (de la Varre, Keane & Irvin, 2010, p. 36). The distance-learning program of BHS reflects this model of service to part-time distance learners, and serves as the largest program within SSD, with over 1/10 of the overall student population, or 120 students, participating in the 2021-2022 school year.

I have embraced these additional duties of managing a robust distance-learning program as a welcome disruption and transition of my professional practice. This concept was a heuristic development which occurred out of immediate need in my professional environment, reaching a crescendo over a number of years (2014 - present), and in 2019, I began to research if my unique professional experience had been acknowledged in the existing literature. The work of de la Varre et al. (2010) described the natural evolution of my professional environment. The existing literature on the expanded on-site facilitator role serves as a justification to continue research in K-12 multi-roles, which this study aims to provide.

In mid-2020, faced with the COVID-19 pandemic as the latest disruptor to the profession, AASL released a position paper titled “School Librarian Role in Pandemic Learning Conditions” (AASL, 2020), providing clarity to the school librarian’s role, once again. The same month, SSD announced the 2021-2022 school year would commence with the fully remote learning option in place. As district planning began for the 2021-2022 school year, SSD announced that Apex Academy would restructure and launch a new, permanent K-12 synchronous remote learning option beginning in the fall of 2021, available to any SSD student in addition to the existing blended learning option that continues to cap enrollment. With this new learning option, any BHS student may elect remote learning on a full-time basis, maintaining a line of enrollment at their home school for participation in athletics and extracurricular activities, but attending classes with students from around the district. The implications of offering library services to BHS remote learners who attend a district-housed program is a new disruption to my professional practice that I must consider moving forward into new school years. Issues of equity are presented with the district’s new remote learning program – how would I, as a high school librarian, collaborate with district-wide teachers in serving our BHS students when they are attending classes with students served by different high school librarians?

Research Design

The methodology of this research study of the perceptions, experiences, and responses of school librarians in evolving roles within diverse instructional settings is phenomenology. Phenomenology is a research approach that “determines the underlying structures of an experience by interpreting the originally given descriptions of the situation in which the experience occurs” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). As explored in Chapter 2, a lack of research examining the lived experiences of K-12 school librarians supports justification for this study.

Glesne (2016) notes that the individuals are homogeneous in their experience with the topic (p. 290). In phenomenological research, the defining characteristic is the *essence* of a common experience, described by Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2015) as a “commonality to how human beings perceive and interpret similar experience; [phenomenologists] seek to identify, understand, and describe these commonalities” (p. 430). For the six school librarians who are participants in this study, the lived common experience being examined is the introduction of a new work environment for the 2021-2022 school year, a permanent, remote-synchronous instructional setting born of the pandemic, which may further evolve the participants’ professional roles.

Phenomenology is rooted in the disciplines of philosophy and psychology and exhibits popular use in sociology and education (Creswell, 2007). The origins of phenomenology can be traced to a German mathematician named Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) (Moustakas, 1994). Writers expounded on his ideas, one of the most prominent cited in modern times as being American psychologist Clark Moustakas (1923-2012). Moustakas emphasized the characteristic of rich description of the essence of participants’ experience, for example, as opposed to “explanations or analyses” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). While two approaches to phenomenology are prominent in qualitative research, hermeneutic (which considers the researcher’s interpretations) and psychological (which relies on participants’ descriptions), Moustakas’ emphasized the latter based upon Husserl’s concept of epoche or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing refers to the practice by the researcher of setting aside one’s own experiences “so that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and question” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). This approach is used in this study.

Value of Specific Methodology

The metrics of K-12 education are steeped in quantitative measures such as CCRPI (the College and Career Ready Performance Index), and the metrics of school librarianship have historically followed suit. Ford (2020) observes that although “quantitative research has undergirded our [library science] profession since its inception” (p. 236), “each person in our human profession, librarianship, has a story to tell” (p. 235). Currently, qualitative approaches account for only about 33% of published library research, although they are on the rise among library faculty members and doctoral students (Ford, 2020).

K-12 education has collectively shifted from a mindset of ‘we teach *content*’ to one of ‘we teach *students*.’ The value of affirming students as individuals and strengthening their relationships is elevated through whole-student reform initiatives such as social-emotional learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and personalized learning. As school librarianship also evolves to encompass new technologies, pedagogies, and instructional models, it is appropriate that the human element to employee work roles is understood to hold value, as well. Phenomenological research is appropriate to understand lived experience. School librarians’ perceptions, experiences, and responses to potential issues of role conflict and/or role strain in evolving, multi-role work environments is an essential experience worthy of study. A beneficial value to this type of research can be “in order to develop practices or policies” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60), an outcome that would be desirable in aligning with human perspectives not necessarily considered. Phenomenology supports the exploration of the central research question in the context of relevant topics, theoretical framework and previous research.

Setting

The setting for this research study includes diverse instructional learning environments where K-12 school librarians serve students within SSD: traditional K-12 brick-and-mortar schools as well as the online academy, Apex Academy, offering two learning formats, blended and virtual. School librarians within SSD are permanently based at each traditional K-12 brick-and-mortar school for their workday, but also serve their students who are cross-enrolled at Apex Academy in both blended and virtual learning formats.

Apex Academy was established in 2011 and since then has served SSD's middle and high school students both in a full-time and part-time blended learning capacity. Apex Academy's traditional, blended method of full and part-time instruction offers self-paced, asynchronous learning through the facilitated use of software supported by a subject-certified teacher. This option continued as an instructional setting in the 2021-2022 school year in the same manner as it was prior to the onset of COVID-19.

Due to a school district response to continue beyond 2021 in accommodating families' remote learning adjustments during COVID-19, and lifestyle adjustments that some families indicated are preferable, SSD committed to allow any SSD student who wishes to learn from home permanently through synchronous instruction to be able to do so. The 2021-2022 school year launched Apex Virtual, the synchronous, fully remote Kindergarten and elementary program, as well as the companion synchronous middle and high school program to Apex Academy's established blended learning program. Enrollment for Apex Academy during the 2021-2022 school year was one in seven SSD students. Impacts of this population shift are seismic to the brick-and-mortar schools as they adjusted for population losses inverse to the district's overall rising student population. As a homogenous group, all K-12 school librarians in

SSD are serving this new population of fully remote, synchronous learners for the first time during the school year of 2021-2022, the year of data collection for this study.

Overall and Sample Populations

The overall population of this study included 49 full-time, certified K-12 school librarians employed by SSD which includes the researcher. Therefore, 48 full-time, certified school librarians were eligible for inclusion in the study. SSD's procedures to conduct research within the school district required that all participant recruitment is managed by the SSD's local IRB committee. Researchers may not recruit participants directly within SSD. The researcher requested 48 school librarians to be contacted by SSD's IRB committee to invite participation, and local IRB approval was granted for 12 invitations to be made. With a limited recruitment process affecting the study, the decision was made by the researcher to focus on middle and high school librarians only, and eliminate elementary level recruitment. Thus, the phenomenological study aimed for a sample population of six participants, to include three from middle school and three from high school. A sample population was sought which represented the range of instructional levels in order to enrich the context of the descriptive interviews; however, the K-12 school librarians are considered a homogeneous group for the purposes of phenomenological research (Glesne, 2016). Each school librarian is certified for employment in all grade levels, K-12, and share a common set of professional standards (AASL, 2018a) and culture. Selection of the participants for this study was purposive, non-random, and consisted of Stakeholder Sampling (Palys, 2008). Priority for selection was made for school librarians who have been awarded district recognition as school librarian of the year, followed by those who have presented at a state or national conference within the previous three years. School librarians holding these criteria are well-versed in their professional work and have demonstrated that they

can communicate effectively, the type of traits that would be beneficial to the interview process for this study. Contingent upon the level of interest, the final inclusion criteria gave priority to those within each school level who have the highest number of years of experience. Following SSD's IRB recruitment process on behalf of myself as researcher, exactly six responses were received in the affirmative – three middle school and three high school librarians. Having achieved a balanced participant pool, the study commenced. School librarians who consented to participate had been employed within SSD for a minimum of three previous school years. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained by my university, Kennesaw State University, and SSD's local IRB committee prior to commencing research.

Description of Participants

The participants of this study included three middle school and three high school librarians from SSD. The diversity of the participants manifested in educational attainment, years of experience, and patron service levels. As described in the previous section, SSD requires that their local IRB committee manage the participant recruitment process. The researcher may request participant recruitment to the local IRB, and the local IRB sends invitations by email to the building principals of potential participants. Based upon principal and participant agreement, inclusion in the study is communicated by building principals to the local IRB committee, and then in turn the local IRB committee informs the researcher. Upon this approval, the researcher may contact participants directly to schedule interviews. Table 1 below outlines the prevailing characteristics of the study's six participants, each of whom agreed to participate and received approval from their building principals:

Pseudonym, In Order of Initial Interview	Years of School Librarian Experience	Current School Librarian Level	Highest Degree	Other Experience
Evelyn	18	High School	Ed.D.	Elementary school librarian Public librarian
Carley	7	High School	Ed.S.	High school art teacher (12 years)
Gena	21	Middle School	Ed.D.	High school librarian Government service sector
Ally	11	High School	Ed.S.	High school Spanish teacher (face-to-face and asynchronous blended)
Joanne	3	Middle School	Ed.S.	High school and middle school social studies teacher (12 years)
Daisy	8	Middle School	M.Ed.	Private sector

I found the participants to be engaging storytellers, which despite the public perception of librarians as bookworms, is not necessarily a trait of the profession. This sample group, however, six leaders of school librarianship among an overall population of 49, expressed themselves compellingly through extended narrative responses. Evelyn, Carley and Ally [pseudonyms] comprised the high school group, and Gena, Joanne and Daisy [pseudonyms] comprised the middle school group. Carley and Gena were each selected as SSD's Media Specialist of the Year within the past three years, and Evelyn and Gena both hold doctorate degrees in education.

Carley, Ally and Joanne were previously classroom teachers of visual arts, Spanish and social studies, respectively, and Gena and Daisy ironically both held non-education field experience in public and private sector communications. Gena previously worked in the press office of a state political figure, and Daisy in the radio industry.

Access to Site (Gaining access and entry, obtaining participant participation, exiting)

Submitted with the school district IRB application was a request to each respective school principal to interview their school librarian, as well as access their school site to conduct the interview ‘on-location’ for the convenience of each participant. Participants who consented to be a part of the study chose to be interviewed either in-person at her school site or virtually in a location of her choice. Per school district IRB guidelines, the interviews took place outside of instructional hours or the employees’ extended designated workday. No significant barriers occurred in obtaining each interview location and time, as the researcher afforded the participants full flexibility in selection and made accommodations accordingly.

Data Collection Procedures

As a participant-researcher, I submitted an application to conduct research to the IRB of my university, Kennesaw State University. Upon receiving approval, I submitted the university’s IRB approval letter in a research application request to SSD’s Policy, Planning and Systems Improvement Office for permission to conduct research within the school district. SSD requires applications for academic research to be submitted eight-ten weeks in advance of the date desired to begin research. Upon this research study having secured approval from both institutions, my university and school district, the phenomenological study commenced.

Data collection strategies for the minimum number of participants aligned with phenomenological inquiry. Creswell (2007) recommends interviewing between five to 25

individuals in phenomenological research; for this study, individual consent was received to conduct interviews with a minimum of six school librarians within SSD, three from the middle school level and three from the high school level. Upon obtaining consent, two semi-structured, qualitative interviews consisting of open-ended lines of inquiry (see Appendices B and C) were conducted individually with six school librarians at neutral locations of their choosing and transcripts created for analysis. Follow-up interviews with each school librarian were conducted 2 weeks after initial interviews. Yin (2011) describes the qualitative interview as “follow[ing] a conversational mode, and the interview itself will lead to a social relationship of sorts, with the quality of the relationship individualized to every participant” (p. 134). Qualitative interviews benefit this study because the research questions seek empirical data to provide rich context for data collection. An interview protocol was created, but the protocol served as an interview guide for the semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview questions were open-ended (Glesne, 2016), leading with a Grand Tour question, to facilitate “thinking of your role as that of a collaborator whose conversational actions facilitate others in the telling of their stories” (Glesne, 2016, p. 113). A minimum of two recording devices were utilized during each interview, with the participant’s consent, to ensure accurate data collection. *Otter.ai* was the technology tool chosen for audio recording and transcription.

During the research process, data security protocols were followed by the researcher which mirrors the handling of confidential data on a daily basis as a professional educator. Data has not be sent by email between persons or between email accounts of the researcher. Raw and analyzed data has been stored securely and protected by passwords which are not published and known only to the researcher. Three years after the conclusion of the study, raw and analyzed

data will be permanently deleted from electronic files, and paper documents will be shredded.

Pseudonyms have been used within the collection process of all electronic and paper data.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis for this phenomenological research study was guided by the device of bracketing. Bracketing is a practice of a researcher of setting aside one's existing knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation so as not to unduly influence the participant's understanding of the phenomenon. Chan, Fung and Chien (2013) challenge researchers employing phenomenology to "adopt an attitude of conscious ignorance" and to "maintain our curiosity" (Chan et al., 2013, p. 4). In this study, bracketing was supported through the use of semi-structured and open-ended participant interviews, so that leading questions did not unduly influence participants' description of the phenomena.

Data analysis occurred through the use of *Dedoose*. Source data files of the qualitative, semi-structured interviews were imported into *Dedoose* from *Otter.ai* as a new project. Primary documents were linked to the project in *Dedoose*, and after that process was completed, the source was considered a primary document. Upon import, segments of data, or quotations, were selected for analysis as "significant statements" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60; p. 61), a process which Moustakas (1994) calls horizontalization (Creswell, 2007). Following horizontalization, coding commenced as the researcher developed "clusters of meaning" (p. 61) or establishment of themes. Following phenomenological data analysis, as researcher, connections were drawn between themes to provide "textural description" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60) of the participants' experiences and "structural description" (p. 60) of the participants' experiences in terms of conditions and/or context of the experiences. Then the descriptions were combined to convey the essence of the lived experience, the heart of phenomenological research. Finally, reports were

created. The researcher determined items to be included in each report. Examples are code groups, comments, quotations, and memos.

Coding is an appropriate method for qualitative data analysis such as for this study because it is “the main categorizing strategy in qualitative research” (Maxwell, 2009, p. 236). Maxwell (2009) states that “the goal of coding is...to rearrange [the data] into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and between categories...Such categorizing makes it much easier for you to develop a general understanding of what is going on, to generate themes and theoretical concepts, and to organize and retrieve your data to test and support these general ideas” (p. 237). Saldana (2009) provides specific insight into coding which is beneficial to me as a researcher: “most qualitative research studies in education will generate 80-100 codes that will be organized into 15-20 categories which eventually synthesize into five to seven major concepts” (Saldana, 2009, p. 20).

Reports were interpreted to draw conclusions surrounding the central research question. As a researcher, I have applied meaning making to the analysis of the interview transcripts. The findings of the data analysis were compiled by the researcher and presented. The goal of constructivist research is to understand phenomena. Through a qualitative examination of rich data, the phenomenon of the evolving roles of school librarians in simultaneous, diverse instructional settings has been explored.

Validity of Interpretation (Applicability, consistency, and trustworthiness)

Shenton (2004) provides a framework by which qualitative researchers may ensure trustworthiness in their studies. Shenton cites Guba (1981) in describing four criteria to be addressed within a qualitative study and respective strategies for each: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). This study aims to utilize these strategies in

order to ensure trustworthiness of the phenomenological study.

The first criteria is credibility. Credibility includes development of early familiarity, background of the researcher, thick description, and examination of previous research. Each of these components has been addressed in the first two chapters of the study. Credibility is supported in this study through utilization of the recognized research method of phenomenology. I provide a rich description of my positionality as a simultaneous school librarian serving brick-and-mortar, blended/online, and remote-synchronous virtual students, as well as serving as an on-site facilitator and as an adjunct online teacher experiencing an evolution of the roles of a school librarian across multiple settings. Full transparency has been maintained throughout the data collection process and in reporting of results. Thick description of the context of the phenomenological study, multiple instructional settings within SSD, while not necessarily applicable to other identical settings, provides readers with the capacity to consider the research in their own diverse instructional environments and make naturalistic generalizations (Shenton, 2004).

The second criteria is transferability. Transferability allows a reader to consider research in light of one's own settings. While the small sample size is appropriate for phenomenological study, the topic is highly relevant to the digital age. Blended learning, online learning, and remote learning are experiencing an upward growth trajectory with tensions arising as schools balance traditional brick-and-mortar learning with permanent, post-pandemic new instructional options offering more lifestyle and learning customization. A detailed description of the study's particular context across diverse instructional settings allows readers to apply aspects of the study to their own contexts.

Dependability is the third criteria which consists of the operational detail of data

gathering. Dependability has been upheld by providing rich detail in all processes. Consistency has been demonstrated in selection of participants according to pre-established criteria of Stakeholder Sampling (Palys, 2008). Anonymity has been maintained of all participants without sacrificing transparency in methods of data collection. Finally, confirmability includes reflective commentary and has been supported by removing opportunities for researcher bias. The research questions are designed as open-ended, allowing for participants to provide “exhaustive description of [the] phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 80). The study includes transparency regarding the researcher’s professional background, experiences, beliefs and assumptions. Limitations and delimitations of the study are discussed.

Limitations and Delimitations

The research study is a phenomenological examination of multi-roles evolving for school librarians from the diversification of instructional settings, and related impacts to those multi-roles such as role conflict and/or role strain. As a researcher and practicing school librarian, a limitation of the study is that researcher bias could influence the data collection and reporting process. Another limitation is that the number of participants, six, represents the low spectrum of minimum participants for phenomenological research. SSD’s conditions for participant recruitment, requiring both the local IRB and building principals to serve as intermediaries in the recruitment process, served as a significant barrier to the recruitment process. Recruitment barriers manifested in the areas of time, word-of-mouth, and momentum. Portrayal of participants required extra care in how their identity was protected, even as pseudonyms were utilized, as the overall population of school librarians in SSD is miniscule compared to other school positions such as teachers, counselors, and administrators.

Delimitations of the phenomenological study are that the sample population of six school

librarians were selected to represent two levels of employment: middle and high school. Another delimitation is that all interviews for data collection occurred within a one- month timeframe in March 2022. School librarians selected for the sample population have had at least three years of work experience, in order that the sample population has served as a school library practitioner through the entirety of a condensed timeframe which included cyclical changes in instructional settings (traditional, blended/online (pandemic), and remote by choice).

Ethical Considerations

As a qualitative researcher, the ethical principles driving this work strictly adhere to the conditions of *The Belmont Report*. The participant-researcher's data collection process and reporting of findings reflect the principle of "do no harm" concerning participants. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from my university, Kennesaw State University, and school district approval was obtained prior to commencing research. As a part of the school district's IRB application process, SSD outlines comprehensive guidelines that must be agreed upon by the researcher as applicant and adhered to for the entire length of the study. Pseudonyms were utilized for the district name, research sites, and for study participants. Confidentiality was maintained without sacrificing transparency in methods of data collection. Informed consent of the participants was obtained according to the introductory script of the interview protocols included in Appendices B and C. The researcher maintained a professional, working relationship with participants, remaining cognizant of the difference in building rapport and establishing friendship. Data collection respected participants' time and questioning was not intrusive. Interviews were requested with options of multiple days and times at the convenience of the participants. As the researcher, I fairly represented all data and drew conclusions

addressing the study's original research question. Three years after the publication of the study, all collected raw data of the research study will be destroyed.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter comprises the findings of the study. The first half of the chapter is organized by three major themes that emerged from interpretation of the data: the local context of the school librarians' role(s), the pandemic as an antagonist to the school librarians' role(s), and tensions experienced within evolution of the school librarians' role(s). The second half of the chapter is organized a discussion of findings related to the overarching research question. This discussion is organized by three relevant sub-questions.

Theme 1: Local Context of the Role

The three middle school and three high school librarians participating in this study reflected passion and discernment about their roles within a mid-point of their careers. All of them came into the school library profession from other pursuits, ranging from classroom teachers to service in private and government sectors to public librarianship. As I interviewed them over the course of a month in March 2022, simultaneous to the early days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I thought of the frequently referenced quote from public personalities: *There are decades where nothing happens, and there are weeks where decades happen* (debated to have been spoken by Lenin). Through the librarians' inflection in their voices and stated appreciation for having been selected as participants for this study, they revealed from the pandemic a self-awareness of navigating their roles through unprecedented times of disruption, where perhaps, they felt decades happening.

Through their storytelling, I soon identified a collective antagonist that was emerging, the pandemic. From there, it fell into place to consider the group, whose essence of experience I am researching, the protagonists. It is important to make the distinction, however, that no matter the question, the trajectory of the protagonists' responses weighed more toward concern with the

effects on their students more than with themselves. Apex Virtual was not a threat to their roles; Apex Virtual was certainly not the antagonist, which I found to be somewhat of a surprise. The antagonist was the pandemic, because its effects were continuing to pose a threat in the form of learning loss and social loss to students in a manner that was not only evolving the librarians' roles, but also doing so in a manner that frequently felt to them like 'one step forward, two steps back.' All expressed resilience and confidence, however, that in some iteration, they would personally have an intervention-type role in their schools in confronting and overcoming these academic and social losses. Carley expressed that school librarians have to "take a step back and realize that this a very special role that we've been given, and we have to be honorable with that role, and be good stewards of it" (Carley, personal interview, 3/28/22).

Of the six participants, Gena, an Ed.D. employed in an upper-socioeconomic middle school of 1277 students, described a performance of duties most closely aligned to widely recognized societal roles of school librarianship. Describing herself as the school's sounding board, she provided in our interviews specific examples of instructional partnerships with teachers, technology integration, and innovative community outreach during the pandemic such as bookmobiles. Gena stated "We do a lot of projects, like teaching [students] how to do book trailers with Adobe Spark" and "there's so many ways that people use technology in my school, like making infographics with Canva, sixth grade social studies is doing that right now" (Gena, personal interview, 3/14/22). Gena considers her role to be the instructional technology specialist of her school through activities such as website-building assistance, she serves as a member of the school leadership team, and she steers expenditures of a significant site-based annual technology budget. Gena also says that literacy is a big part of her job, including making reading

fun, and described learning loss of her students as the primary focus for her school in 2021-2022 as well as the focus of operational planning in looking ahead to 2022-2023.

Carley is a high school librarian of 1572 students with a background as both a high school visual arts teacher and a middle school librarian. Like Gena, Carley perceives herself as a technology leader, with her defining characteristic being intuition instead of budget: “knowing what to present, how to present it, and when...you’re almost able to provide [teachers] what they need even really maybe before they realize that they need it” (Carley, personal interview, 3/14/22). Carley believes that technology has served to level the playing field in education and is a function of equity.

Carley’s personality is evident in her school librarianship role. When I first visited Carley in her library a couple of years ago upon recommendation of the district, it was clear why she had been named Media Specialist of the Year. Like Gena, who would earn the title in a subsequent year, Carley is student-focused and used her background as an art teacher to expand traditional norms of school librarianship. Focusing on the whole-self, tables were set up in one area of the library designated as a “Decompress Zone,” with coloring sheets, coloring books, and an assortment of markers, crayons, colored pencils and other art materials. Hand-painted murals covered the cinderblock walls, and a mobile single-cup coffee station was kept ready, stocked with an assortment of flavors. In our interview, she described her role as the school’s bartender in the psychological sense (similar to Gena as sounding board), and said that she seeks to build relationships with absolutely everyone, from individual students to the greater community. She leverages those relationships in order to know her teachers well enough to apply intuition to their technology needs, for example. Carley noted that one of the few bright spots during the pandemic was that students had more time to pursue their personal interests, and when the school

buildings reopened, they wanted to maintain those hobbies and pursue them in ways expressed at school.

Evelyn and Ally are high school librarians of 1525 and 1731 students, respectively. Joanne and Daisy are middle school librarians of 885 and 1073 students, respectively. Interviews with each of these four differed from Gena and Carley in that they described their roles as significantly evolved since the start of the pandemic. Evelyn holds a doctorate in education and is employed at the highest-performing high school in the district, when measured by test scores. Evelyn has a background in both public librarianship and elementary school librarianship, and is very straightforward with a witty sense of humor and good cheer. Noting her recent role as a frequent substitute teacher, Evelyn stated that the school library's vision is shaped by the school's needs, and clarified more bluntly that "it's whatever the principal wants you to do" (Evelyn, personal interview, 3/9/22). She shared the story that when she worked as an elementary school librarian in a school with a 70% ELL population (English-Language Learners), the principal categorized library time as within the students' fine arts rotation schedule and assigned her to teach them ELA (English Language Arts), which she did as best she could.

Ally was the interview that I most looked forward to repeating. A high school librarian, a varsity tennis coach, a testing coordinator, and a former Spanish teacher with both face-to-face and blended teaching experience through Apex Academy, it was impossible to put her in a box. Ally's use of a sports vernacular to describe her role as a high school librarian provided in two words the sentiment I have been attempting to express for over twenty years: utility person:

I've been used as a utility person in a lot of ways. [The principal] says we need this. We need you to do it, because we don't have anybody else to do it...In this county, your job is whatever your principal wants you to do. There are things that you have to do...it's

however they want to use you...a special rotation, a study hall...we're putting out fires and solving problems for people all day (Ally, personal interview, 3/17/22).

Talking to Ally, I sensed that she is bursting at the seams to apply her teaching experience to the library environment. Teaching is her wheelhouse, and she wants to collaborate just as she did within a World Language department. She described a number of barriers to that teaching and partnership role, however, which will be elaborated upon in a further section. Her 'wins,' however, were clearly fulfilling. Ally described a collaboration she currently has with the math department, not a typical partnership area for high school librarians. She works with the AMDM classes (Advanced Math Decision Making), showing them how to find statistical studies, and she teaches them about the differences in studies vs. articles. Ally also described the importance of forming good partnerships; at the beginning of the pandemic, she provided a calm voice to an anxious co-worker about hybrid teaching: "this is how you do breakout rooms...they felt like they had a teammate" (Ally, personal interview, 3/22/22).

To say that middle school librarians Joanne and Daisy's words could have been spoken by any of the others, or vice versa, should not diminish anyone's dedication, individuality, or expression of the many hats they each wear. Joanne utilizes relationship building, like the others but in her own way, to head off student behavior issues: "I get a lot of contact with people, whether with technology, printing, or projects, so it gives me a leg up when there's behavioral issues. I rarely have many, because I am the lady that helps you" (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17/22). Joanne accepts her role as an interventionist, or alternate location for students experiencing behavior issues elsewhere: "I get [sent] a lot of people like the ones that need their timeouts. But they just can't be in classrooms right now. I'm a safer space...you're literally mental, social and physical support" (Joanne, 3/17/22). Like Ally at the high school level, Joanne

serves as a testing coordinator at her middle school, one of many hats she embraces. Of the group, Joanne was the most animated and perhaps most optimistic. Her background is that of a high school social studies teacher, and she shared the fun fact that her sister is also a school librarian in another school district. Our interviews ran the longest in a complimentary way. Joanne is very comfortable in her role(s) and very well versed, contextualizing each point.

Middle school librarian Daisy describes the school librarian's role as dependent upon the school, a familiar sentiment: "I think my mission has to change every couple of years. My job is to meet the needs of my school. And if that's in a different way in a couple years, then that's okay" (Daisy, personal interview, 3/18/22). Daisy recognizes the importance of relationship building with faculty and administration, like the other participants. She aims to be a resource in both materials and persons, telling her teachers that if they do not know where to locate something, ask her, and she will direct them to the correct person, even if outside of the county. Daisy entered school librarianship from a background in communications, like Gena, although Daisy's experience was from the business side of radio. Daisy has carved her own role within school librarianship from her background in communications: "That wasn't really something that was posted, I kind of just jumped into that and made myself that position" (Daisy, personal interview, 3/18/22).

Through the participants' rich descriptions of their role(s), they are clearly a knowledgeable and highly professional group. Their resilience and love for their positions was evident through the passion with which each of them spoke. They conveyed that they are lucky to hold their current positions and they will pivot and evolve through any challenge. Had I not stopped each interview at approximately the 40-minute mark, I sensed that they would have been happy to continue our conversations.

Theme 2: The Pandemic, Antagonist

As I recurrently interviewed the six SSD middle and high school librarians over the course of a month in the late winter and early spring of 2022, I began to view the COVID-19 pandemic as an ever-present antagonist of an unfolding story. The group frequently re-directed conversation away from their own roles and rather toward perceived collateral damage done to students' academic, social and emotional psyche that the entire K-12 education system must now navigate and re-construct. Positive societal health data on low community spread and hospitalization rates as we are now experiencing in early spring, 2022, did not correlate to a return to a perceived 'return to normal' in their K-12 settings. The emotional toll and concern among the school librarians revealed itself as persistent in their inflections as it was in their responses. Changes to the school librarians' role(s) this school year are originating from three main pressure points: students' learning loss, students' social/emotional behavioral loss, and planning for changes to school operations to address literacy. Joanne stated:

The pandemic has truly hampered them in every way, whether it is socially, academically, and I would even go so far as to argue mentally, because I have never seen the behaviors that they exhibit. They are those of someone from two years behind, like my eighth graders act exactly like a traditional sixth grader, my sixth graders act exactly like a fourth grader. It is like they did not make any progress (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17/22).

Student learning loss was a recurrent theme; in addition to Joanne, noticeable student learning loss was mentioned by Gena, Carley, and Evelyn. Gena knew her middle school's statistics, stating that only 39% are reading at or above grade level, a point of obvious concern. Carley stated that her high school is "frenzied" trying to make up 2 years of education in 1 year,

resulting in decreased library visits as they focus on basic instruction: “The pace they seem to be at is like breakneck speed of trying to make up a gap in learning” (Carley, personal interview, 3/14/22). Evelyn stated that pre-pandemic, she taught a generic lesson for her high school students on how to cite sources for research, but now “they need a full lesson to actually be shown how to do it” (Evelyn, personal interview, 3/9/22). Joanne suggested that there was a leniency in grading practices during the pandemic, and this perceived leniency is reflected in a decline of the quality of students’ work now, by her observation. Time management was an untaught skill negatively affecting students during the pandemic, as observed by Joanne. Joanne also observed the learning loss in students’ reading ability, noticing that her middle school students are choosing the graphic novels written for late elementary students over materials on their grade level.

Joanne has also observed a loss in her middle school students’ technology skills:

I find that while I push technology forward, I still have to go back to the basics constantly. [A student says] ‘I have this thing saved on my Google Drive. And I cannot find it.’ And it’s just a matter of learning how to do a search. I am still having to teach kids about older technology, like how to save a document...how to find the file and hit print...my kids do not understand how to turn on the desktops. They turn on the monitor only and say it is not working (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17).

Students’ social/emotional learning loss has also profoundly affected the school librarians’ roles this school year, as they are spending significant time focused on improving behaviors and providing social guidance and support. Four of the librarians raised the issue, three at the middle school level (Daisy, Gena, and Joanne) and one at the high school level (Ally). Ally stated “school is really hard. I think kids have become super disconnected from just the whole

process of school...they are [displaying behaviors] that they have never done” (Ally, personal interview, 3/17/22) and “obviously, the pandemic did its damage on everybody and everything” (Ally, personal interview, 3/22/22).

Daisy referenced an important function of traditional, face-to-face school as instilling the concept of socialization in children, or how one should operate in life:

I have kind of scaled back trying to focus on the more academic skills [now it's] get in their brains and really just focus on like, you know, hey I just handed you a pencil, what do you generally say? Nothing. It is a thank you, you say thank you...just showing kids that when people are walking toward you, you naturally walk to the right...they don't stand in line...and I am not saying everybody, but majority...my role has morphed into...please chat with me...at least that's a human you're talking to” (Daisy, personal interview, 3/18/22).

Daisy also indicated that her role has changed this year because she is on hall duty much more of the time, for example: “I've been in the hallway at every transition because even if it's not a full fight, it's some sort of altercation or disagreement” (Daisy, personal interview, 3/18/22). Gena, also in middle school, volunteered the same: “Academic problems become a chain reaction to behavior problems...more kids don't know how to act around each other. With free time, they want their phone instead of talking to each other” (Gena, personal interview, 3/14/22). Joanne also noted that students do not know how to fall back in with someone telling them directives.

Evelyn and Carley, both at the high school level, offered the essence of the same response when asked to express the focus of their school this year. Evelyn stated that the focus now is student support and “that's it, wherever they're at” (Evelyn, personal interview, 3/9/22).

Carley concurred, stating that the emphasis is building relationships and the needs of the school's students, which change constantly.

The pandemic has also caused school sites to refocus their efforts to address learning and social losses, which in turn is evolving the school librarians' roles. Ally perhaps experienced the greatest consequences: "My library was closed during the pandemic because they did not want to do contact tracing. I did virtual lessons. I feel like this is really our first year [open]" (Ally, personal interview, 3/17/22). Joanne also characterizes a rebuilding year: "I am hoping to get back to library business...we want our center back. It has been hard...we're trying to recreate the sense of community that was lost...our greatest emphasis is doing the business of school" (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17/22). Gena said that student interest in her library reading challenges has decreased since the pandemic: "Everyone is back at the drawing board...we're talking about changing our entire way we do things, changing our schedule, eliminating certain types of classes, and the emphasis [next year] will be on reading" (Gena, personal interview, 3/14/22). Daisy is already looking ahead: "[if emergency remote learning happens again] I think I would have to go talk to people and say, 'What do you want my role to be?'" (Daisy, personal interview, 3/25/22).

Theme 3: Tensions within Evolution of the Role

The six school librarians revealed similar variables, or tensions, affecting their professional role(s) in a way that they considered a hindrance. Three themes emerged within these interview responses: tensions impacting their role(s) as effective instructional partners and information literacy specialists, tensions impacting their role(s) as effective technology leaders, and tensions surrounding emerging role(s) being unrealized because of the structure of Apex Virtual. While the structure of Apex Virtual is included in broader considerations of the first two

topics, as well, responses were often rooted in either the pandemic or the nature of the school library position as a discipline.

Tensions Impacting the Role of Instructional Partners and Information Literacy Specialists

The practice of school librarianship continues to experience tensions from outside influences. Several of the school librarians, Evelyn, Ally, and Joanne, observed that the pandemic seemingly manifested in the practice of isolated instruction, with collaborative partnerships more difficult than ever to initiate with teachers. Evelyn's opinion is that teachers are territorial over their content. Ally lamented that students do not understand how much she can help them, because their teachers do not expose them to the library:

It feels like survival mode, you know, and it is hard to pressure people [to collaborate]...I think that people do not know what we do. They do not know what our job entails...A few ELA teachers will let me dive into reading with their kids. A handful will let me show their kids research databases. Other than that, I have yet to teach anything else in this building" (Ally, personal interview, 3/17/22).

Joanne feels resistance, as well, saying that "I have to show how the technology can help and push it to make it keep moving forward, because a lot of people get stuck in their ways" (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17/22). On our follow-up interview, Ally spoke with more passion on the same subject:

Academic inquiry should really be embedded in the instructional process... That process of gathering information, synthesizing information, discerning information, that is really where those teachers should be looking to is to us... I would imagine it should be that way. I do not think it is that way, though... And I think there is very few that actually do (Ally, personal interview, 3/22/22).

Another tension within current service of the school librarian's role as instructional partners and as information literacy specialists is a shared feeling of loss due to perceived regression in the students' reading skill as a result of the pandemic. Gena, Joanne, and Ally each expressed this sentiment. Gena and Joanne, both middle school librarians, separately stated that their students are gravitating away from the Young Adult section and more toward the graphic novels. Gena recalled the energy levels of students at the height of popularity of series' such as *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight* in the mid to late 2000s. She said that nothing of that level is capturing this generation's attention in that way, and she attributes it to students' having their phones accessible to social media all the time during the pandemic. Ally observes that at the high school level, the library has largely fallen away from students' radar.

Foot traffic is an important concept in the culture of librarianship, and Ally mentioned that district changes to the school entrances to enhance security have created tensions. Each high school was designed similarly, and has been redesigned the same. "I am not on the way to anything...there is no natural flow...[the] in and out of the library has pretty much stopped, and it's hard to have the energy to figure out how to change that" (Ally, personal interview, 3/17/22). Carley, also working at the high school level, laments that attracting new student patrons into the library is difficult. She says that if they do not come in through an ELA class, and they do not come in on their own, how does one get them inside? Daisy, at the middle school level, says that ELA teachers refuse to bring their classes to the library because the students will be distracted and they do not want to waste time.

Time management is another issue cited by the school librarians as impacting collaborative partnerships and their role(s) as information literacy specialists. Joanne notes that the middle school grade level teachers are all teaching the same content on the same schedule

and that she cannot be everywhere. She says that the only way she could see implementation of a role for herself as an embedded librarian is as a one-stop shop, which she says is a Catch-22.

When asked about school librarians holding an instructional partnership role more deeply as an embedded librarian, Gena also cited time as a barrier with the concept. Ally made note of 80 teachers comprising her high school faculty with which she is to collaborate, and wonders why the district does not allow extra contract days for school librarians to work (with pay), such as that school counselors and administrators are eligible?

Tensions Impacting the Role of Effective Technology Leaders

Technology leadership is another role in which tensions emerged within the group. Despite five of the six school librarians serving at their principal's request on their school's leadership team (the exception was middle school librarian Joanne), four of the six (Evelyn, Ally, Joanne, and Daisy) expressed dissatisfaction with their technology leadership role. Concerns included the move toward standardization of software resources, access to software resources, limited decision-making ability of school librarians and limited training offered on the district-selected resources. Evelyn stated that technology leadership opportunities are currently limited in this county for school librarians, with district guidance and support lacking. Ally feels as though the district is moving toward standardization of resources, and she feels as though the district has imposed too many limitations on what one can and cannot use. Ally states:

I was the tech girl at my last school...it is almost like we are not allowed to be that anymore...you know, we have people for that...we are supposed to use things that they are paying lots of money for. We are not supposed to be creative. If we can use something one day, the next day it is blocked. It has made me feel like well, I guess I need to take a step back (Ally, personal interview, 3/17/22).

Daisy shares Ally's concerns, suggesting that the district-selected resources are not necessarily user-friendly. Daisy would like to see the district specify what is for in-person learning and what is for virtual settings. She says the current messaging is actually that schools are supposed to be reigning back digital use: "They are pushing print textbooks again. There are a lot of inconsistencies" (Daisy, personal interview, 3/25/22). Daisy also spoke about technology leadership in terms of budget decisions: "If something gets broken, or if something needs to be purchased, or we want to brainstorm something involving technology, I feel like I'm very much out of a leadership role" (Daisy, personal interview, 3/18/22).

Joanne says that she sometimes feels disconnected with the software that is being enforced, such as for online textbooks, and she would like the Technology Office to provide training, or at a minimum, troubleshooting tips in order to better assist teachers. Ally also feels disconnected with the teachers' experience with the district software such as for online textbooks. She says she gets questions about it from teachers, but without training, she feels disconnected. "When a teacher can't access something, I'm the first person they're emailing. And there's usually nothing I can do (it's instructional technology). And I hate to have to tell them that I can't assist" (Ally, personal interview, 3/17/22).

Ally also feels that she is not growing as a technology leader because innovative professional development of the past is no longer presented to the school librarians group. She wonders why the school librarians do not have a dedicated district office representative with a background in library media (school librarians are under the umbrella of instructional technology and share the same supervisor from the field of instructional technology).

I would much rather be teaching kids how to build a website from scratch, or something like that, but it does not feel allowed. So, you know, as a human...you can only get

disappointed and burned so many times before you're like okay, okay (Ally, personal interview, 3/17/22).

Tensions Impacting Emerging Roles Due to the Structure of Apex Virtual

A third source of tension identified by the group is the inaugural structure of the remote-synchronous side of Apex Academy, for which the 49 school librarians of SSD do not have a defined role. Middle school librarian Daisy was not familiar with Apex Academy's expansion into K-12, from 6-12 only, and into remote-synchronous, from blended only, prior to our interview. Gena, also a middle school librarian, was quite knowledgeable of Apex Academy's core instructional model, but confused on the vision of a potential librarian's role, if any: "Apex Academy has a physical library, but there's no one working in it. So I don't understand how that works" (Gena, personal interview, 3/14/22). Gena was the only participant who had experienced a collaboration with an Apex Academy faculty member, if only minimal: "They don't have a librarian. So sometimes people will email each other...I've had a friend that works over there email me and ask for help" (Gena, personal interview, 3/21/22).

Carley rhetorically asked herself in the initial interview why she has not reached out to an Apex Academy teacher, implying confusion as she considered her role for the first time as it relates to this new instructional setting: "Well, why haven't I done that?...why haven't I reached out?" (Carley, personal interview, 3/14/22). During our follow-up interview two weeks later, Carley revealed that prior to our first interview, she had never really thought about Apex Academy students or faculty as needing library services. The question had weighed on Carley's mind in the interim, however, because she said that she had reflected on how she can reach out specifically to Apex Academy faculty members to offer assistance. Considering students, Carley said that Apex Academy students could work through Nearpod's Common Sense media platform

(a district-provided resource for teaching digital citizenship and new media literacy competencies).

Gena expressed the same line of thought. Regarding the teaching of new media literacies such as netiquette, online safety, digital citizenship, and navigating digital culture within the realm of a school librarian's information literacy specialist role, Gena stated:

Those [Apex Virtual] kids are online all the time. So they even have more of a need for [information literacy]. It would be great if they have someone that was trained in that, to do that. But in the meantime, I don't know. Is anyone doing that? (Gena, personal interview, 3/21/22).

Ally's position was slightly defensive, as if she was internalizing the burden upon herself for Apex Virtual's exclusion from having a school librarian. Ally stated that if Apex Virtual said they needed a digital citizenship lesson, for example, she would be happy to pre-record something:

If [Apex Virtual] needed something, you know, all they have to do is ask...It's not on my radar unless you're asking, because there's one million things that I have to do here and that's not at the top of my mind" (Ally, personal interview, 3/22/22).

Like Ally, Evelyn seemingly placed burden upon herself to rectify the situation temporarily on a collaborative level, rather than permanently on a structural level. Evelyn laments that somebody has to take the first step to reach out to Apex Academy, but she is uncertain as to whether it should be the school librarian, or someone else.

Unlike Ally and Evelyn who are leading from the heart, Joanne's responses were quite nuanced towards a needed solution at the structural or administrative level. She presented several scenarios that would impede any of the school librarian's roles of instructional partner,

technology leader, or information literacy specialist without a dedicated school librarian position for Apex Virtual faculty and students. Joanne recognizes a problem if an Apex Virtual teacher, for example, assigned one of their remote-synchronous American literature classes a research project:

The problem for Apex there, you know, the kids [are zoned] to homeschool, but not every kid is in the same homeschool. So you could easily have it where you are having four or five different librarians trying to teach the exact same group of kids. I'm teaching John, they're teaching Mary, they're teaching Sylvia and so on and so forth. And you kind of get muddled in your message...I'd be worried about that (Joanne, personal interview, 3/22/22).

Joanne also noted that with Apex Virtual's current structure, Apex Virtual teachers would not know how to follow protocol to partner with a school librarian because they are hired to work for Apex Virtual only, while their students carry an affiliation to a zoned homeschool. Apex Virtual faculty do not have any such affiliation. Similar to Ally's comment about the importance of foot traffic to a school library program, Joanne considers that she could not draw patrons in the virtual environment by dropping in to their settings. Joanne also laments that teachers are impossible to reach by email when they are in the same building as the librarian is working, so she cannot imagine trying to collaborate with an Apex Virtual teacher who would be even farther away. Joanne's responses represented a program evaluation of sorts, and her approach was that of a bird's eye view objectively examining logistics instead of providing an expedient, one-dimensional antidote. My thought was that Joanne has the mind of an administrator.

Data Interpretations to Answer Research Sub-Questions

Q1: Role experiences

As instructional settings diversify within a 1:1 school district, how, if at all, do K-12 school librarians experience their roles evolving and/or proliferating?

As a participant-researcher employing the use of bracketing, I thought prior to commencing data collection that the launch of Apex Academy's remote-synchronous setting for K-12 (and similar programs across the country) would weigh heaviest on the school librarians' minds. I did not expect that the pandemic, largely in a relative state of 'a return to normalcy' at the time of this study's data collection phase, would continue to exert such a large influence on evolving the school librarian's role(s). The school librarians revealed that the pandemic focused schools' attention on student needs, and the school librarians were following suit. Carley noted that "I feel like our essence as a society is depending more and more on schools to raise our children, not just educational, but now we have mental health facilitators and all of these things" (Carley, personal interview, 3/28/22). In that spirit, Carley said that students and their needs shape the current role of school librarians, and that her current emphasis is building relationships with her students: "meet them on their playing field" (Carley, personal interview, 3/14/22). The school librarians are seeking how to prioritize the human side of their role(s). Gena wondered how one can build a community culture in the virtual environment. Daisy recalled that during deployment of the emergency hybrid learning model of 2020, she struggled to build relationships with her students. Daisy also recognized that Apex Academy students do not participate in the social-emotional learning curriculum that face-to-face students receive. Ally approaches her work from the standpoint of equity, trying to make sure she has all reading levels in her high school collection. Ally also provided one of the most poignant comments I have heard in the past

couple of years: “I just don’t think life can be lived from the chest up” (Ally, personal interview, 3/17/22).

The school librarians continued to see their role(s) evolving more into digital spaces, but they are open to keeping up, and more concerned about literacy than the medium in which it occurs: “I hope we will have more of a return to reading” (Gena, personal interview, 3/28/22). Carley suggests adapting one’s title and physical spaces to whatever will generate interest, to whatever will meet the current needs of the community. Evelyn predicts of the future:

Digital, it is going to be split, we are still going to have the shell of a media center...I think it’s going to be a 60/40 split. 60% will be digital work, working with online students, and then 40% will be the ones actually [face-to-face] (Evelyn, personal interview, 3/30/22).

Ally predicted that school librarians in the district may adapt to digital spaces by producing a shared video catalog where students can access lessons such as how to check your email, how to do research, etc. Videos could be specialized for different age levels and the school librarians could focus on their specialty areas, so that as a collective, students have access to the best of the best. Carley proposed that through a combination of print and digital resources, school libraries will evolve in the mold of public libraries, with the role of school librarians’ more toward assisting students in pursuit of their personal interests.

Ally pointed out that in her high school, through her bird’s eye view of instruction, she feels qualified to take on a role in teacher evaluation. Ally perceives her role closer to administration, and I recalled her earlier point that she wonders why school librarians are not required to work additional days on the lengthened school calendar of administrators and school counselors. Ally also serves as Apex Academy’s blended learning facilitator for her high school,

and she sees that role continuing or expanding. Ally also serves as an adjunct Spanish teacher for the blended side of Apex Academy. Joanne, at the middle school level, houses less than ten blended Apex Academy students daily in the school library, but she does not serve the dual role of facilitator. Facilitators post grades and serve as a liaison between Apex Academy, the home school, and parents. As instructional settings diversify, it is important for school librarians to have knowledge of each setting running concurrently in their district, because even if they are not directly involved in operations, they are likely involved in housing students, taking attendance and understanding each student's daily travel schedule, which is a safety issue.

While optimistic of school librarians' potential for innovation and adaptation, concerns were evident among the group about the long-term prognosis of the profession. Joanne stated:

I think for a role, we have to keep moving, because we do not want to be phased out.

Okay? Because that is one thing, especially now with the pandemic and people picking and choosing what they what they think maybe we can do less of. I do not want to be the thing left in the dust. I do not want to be the buggy whip maker, when the car came, we do not need you anymore. So I feel like our role, we have to shift and change with the times even if it's a little weird and it's become more hybrid. We kind of get to roll with it at this point (Joanne, personal interview, 3/22/22).

Evelyn expressed an empirical observation about recruitment and entry into the school library profession "I think the certification is being lowered because maybe some people are not going into the field anymore" (Evelyn, personal interview, 3/9/22). Gena expressed a concern that she sees more turnover in the school librarian positions within our county, and that positions remain posted for a longer length of time.

Ally made an interesting observation because she touched on a point that others had mentioned, standardization of technology tools within the school district, but she expanded that concern to include personnel, specifically, standardization of the school librarian's actual role. She was the only participant who made this connection; however, it is relevant to me as a researcher because I see a parallel of her point to the ebb and flow of book censorship that is currently in the news cycle, but familiar to career school librarians who experience the phenomenon in cycles:

My hope is that we can save our profession...without just shameless self-promotion... From what I see happening, I feel like our role is going to get diminished. I feel like this district is looking to standardize everything. And they want everybody on one level playing field, which in theory, sounds awesome. But when you're on the same playing field, you're not pulling from the same roster, right? You know, you can't be equal. You know this. So I feel like, at some point, what we have on our shelves is going to be told to us...[I] just feel like that's the direction we're going. Okay, I hope it is not. But I feel like it is. And I feel like we are just going to be a person that just fills this role. And then we just all do the same thing (Ally, personal interview, 3/22/22).

The subject of the K-12 remote-synchronous side of Apex Virtual drew a range of emotions and responses from the group. I thought of the expression 'all over the map' as they were coming to terms with the concept as they considered their responses. As previously mentioned, middle school librarian Daisy was the only participant who was not previously aware of the new instructional setting until our initial interview. High school librarian Ally had not deeply considered her particular role in relation to them, but she had heard that Apex Virtual's remote-synchronous teachers are overextended and some have up to 300 students on roster:

As a school librarian, I have very little that I do with those kids. Unless they email me directly. Or ask me something directly. I just do not have much that I am offering them currently. Could I? Sure. Probably. Should I? Yes. But I'm not. It is such a complex situation. It is almost like I don't even know where to start to make something happen on that end... You [the researcher] may have been the only person, I think, that's really even made that a point, even in my mind, that there's kids that you're not serving that you should be serving (Ally, personal interview, 3/22/22).

Joanne struggled, I believe, to separate a defensive posture (also expressed by others) from a deeper reflection which was realized later:

I do not think [Apex Virtual is] a sustainable system...not for our generation of kids. Like I said, they are stunted, emotionally as well as academically...School is not there just to teach you educationally, it is there to teach you how to work socially. And without that social learning, you end up with a lot of people who don't understand how to work with others at all (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17/22).

By the follow-up interview, however, Joanne's opinion included more nuance: "For some people, that is the best way for them to do school" (Joanne, personal interview, 3/22/22). Joanne then offered the example of herself, who was a successful college Dual Enrollment student while in high school. Like Joanne, Evelyn mentioned that she has observed experiences where some students do really well in the virtual environment. Evelyn brought up the example of her own college student daughter, who she said earned the highest grades of her college career during the pandemic when classes suddenly went virtual. Evelyn also praised the idea of the remote-synchronous option for K-12:

I think anytime you put an actual person in the equation where there is some accountability there, that is going to help your [remote] instruction...My concern is I wish they had an online librarian for them. Because I have had that question. Those parents have asked for books” (Evelyn, personal interview, 3/9/22).

Evelyn does not foresee the addition of a dedicated Apex Virtual librarian position, however. She feels as though the only way for collaboration to occur is for the Apex Virtual teachers to be divided between the existing 49 face-to-face building librarians. While an incremental step, this proposal does not solve the student zoning issue pointed out by Joanne, whereas a single class completing the same assignment would not have equity in resources from returning to their zoned school libraries: “Who actually serves them? Because you know, usually, I belong to the [5-school] cluster, right? So theoretically, I could help anyone that’s in the [5-school] cluster” (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17/22).

Joanne proposed that Apex Virtual could have a dedicated virtual space for their school with a virtual librarian that manages digital collections. Looking ahead five years or more, Joanne predicts that school librarians will become more of a technology support role, a role that she does not think impacts our standing for the better. Joanne perceives the future of Apex Virtual and library services through the lens of her public library experience, anticipating that Apex Virtual students will receive library services upon request: “You will only get the ones who ask for you. You do not have as much exposure...only a select few who realize their resources and they get directed toward you” (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17/22). Gena views the existing structure of Apex Virtual as an equity issue: “Why wouldn’t [those students and faculty] have the same resources as the other schools?...I don’t see a role [for school librarians] right now. But there’s definitely room for one” (Gena, personal interview, 3/14/22).

Q2: Role conflict and/or role strain experiences

As instructional settings diversify within a 1:1 school district, how, if at all, have school librarians experienced role conflict and/or role strain?

The six school librarians described a significant evolution to their role(s) in the 2021-2022 school year that they attribute to ongoing effects of the pandemic. They each describe an array of duties and role(s) that they are serving, but their attitude reflects resilience and they share consensus that each role is one that someone must perform at this point and time. The role(s) are diverse enough, however, to reinforce the local context of their role(s) and dependence upon their principal to define the parameters within which they work.

The most consistent response received was the school librarians' responses regarding the role of substitute teaching. Most are experiencing role conflict currently from this assigned role. They view it as a consequence of the pandemic, however, and not necessarily a permanent evolution of their role(s). High school librarian Evelyn stated in the first interview: "I'm more monitoring classes, I would say, so my role has drastically changed over the past two years" (Evelyn, personal interview, 3/9/22). During the follow-up interview, Evelyn elaborated: "I'm not teaching the classes that I want to because I'm wearing more hats. Because of substituting, I am slacking in the other of what I would be doing" (Evelyn, personal interview, 3/30/22). Middle school librarian Joanne concurred, stating:

I did not realize my life would become so much more substituting as it did, because I never realized that would kind of become my role. But I also understand right now, that's my duty. That is what I've been asked to do. And that it what I'm going to do, because I'm faithful in my duties...From the pandemic, I became a permanent substitute.

Literally, I was running four Google Meets at a time..." (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17/22).

Joanne also described a recent example of a situational role conflict that she experienced. This particular conflict was between administration of assessments and substitute teaching, with competing administrators giving her directives:

We were out six teachers. And we just finished back-to-back testing. And I had to do makeups. And one vice principal is asking me to watch a class. The other one who is in charge of testing is telling me, okay, makeups are going to get done. But yeah, we've got to get it done by this deadline. So I need you to do makeups. And the two weren't talking at all. And so it was such a struggle, just because I don't know who to say yes to. And then it became kind of a thing between them struggling about what I do. And then the principal had to weigh in and then make a decision. And then you just feel awful all the way around (Joanne, personal interview, 3/22/22).

High school librarian Carley also listed recent examples of extra duties she had been asked to perform, which led to the experience of role strain in her position. They included serving lunch duty, serving bus duty, handing out treats to faculty and staff, and collecting student field trip forms. Like Joanne, high school librarian Ally is heavily involved in the testing process:

[I think] that stack of books can wait to be cataloged. Right? I've got to get this [testing] done now. Okay, because you know, I've got an Advanced Placement test order to submit and it's due by midnight, and I've got to make sure, right?...I'm really tired...there's just not enough hours in the day" (Ally, personal interview, 3/22/22).

Middle school librarian Gena experienced role ambiguity early in her career when she was asked by an assistant principal to form a committee to read every book in her combined middle/high

school library and provide a recommendation on every book. Reading each book was an impossible task and revealed that the administration did not understand her role of library program manager nor the materials selection process within that role.

Another area of role conflict experienced by the school librarians was between themselves and SSD's instructional technology specialists. Previously mentioned was Ally's concerns regarding the standardization of resources, as well as the inaccessibility with resources often being blocked or no longer approved. Daisy shared Ally's concerns, stating that the district's instructional technology specialists are revamping approved technology tools, and that one will discover an approved tool is sometimes blocked. Daisy's opinion is that this sort of recurring discrepancy is the perfect type of area that a school librarian could effectively sort out.

A practical scenario that schools navigated at the beginning of the pandemic was emergency setup of live Google Classrooms to include managing breakout rooms, etc. Teachers needed quick assistance and training and because only five instructional technology specialists serve SSD, teachers who needed help turned to their school librarians. Carley and Joanne disagree regarding who should have assisted teachers' with Google Classroom setup. Carley says it was a role for the school librarian, but Joanne says that the instructional technology specialist should take the lead. Joanne seemingly reconsiders her opinion, however, when she states that she could successfully assist with virtual teachers' ability to mediate a students' chat box stream of conversation, which she observed as frequently going off-topic: "they'll get extra commentary from students" (Joanne, personal interview, 3/22/22). Another point made concerned the online textbooks and associated software provided by SSD to teachers. School librarians are not trained on the software, yet teachers ask them questions as if they are the instructional technology specialists: "It's hard for us to answer [instructional technology] questions, when we're not using

the same language [as the instructional technology specialists]. That's my biggest problem" (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17/22).

The school librarians performing the duties of each school's site-based network application specialists experienced role strain. These positions manage the hardware of the 1:1 program for students and teachers. Daisy said that when the network application specialists were based in the SSD Technology Office, technology repair was her role:

At that point in my career, yes, that was very much a conflict because I didn't feel like I could do my library stuff. I did not feel like I could promote reading and do meaningful lessons because I was also the support for this revolving door. Now, even after this pandemic business, I finally feel like I am starting to fulfill what I see as a library (Daisy, personal interview, 3/25/22).

In Evelyn's high school, she serves still today as a backup to the network application specialist. Joanne describes herself as "deeply involved on the physical end...I'm actually really good at popping back on keys, okay?... 'Oh my screws fell out on the back. Now the hinges are coming apart'...I might as well wear 1000 hats" (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17/22).

The most surprising area of role conflict revealed by the group was between their perceived school librarian role(s) and the role(s) of administration. Joanne acknowledged "you kind of sometimes get pulled into more of an administrative role" (Joanne, personal interview, 3/22/22). Joanne revealed:

I am the one in charge of MAP testing. Okay. I am there for when the teachers first give out the test and the one providing technology to them. I have to sit in the halls and provide the computers and help them...after that, the teachers compile the list of the ones who have not been here, and then it is my job to track them down and get them tested for

both English and math. Currently, in the last week or three or four days, I have tested 304 students. I have only 26 left. So I'm very proud of myself" (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17/22).

Joanne is also in charge of all textbook distribution at her middle school. Gena performs in an administrative role regarding technology budgeting and decision-making for her school, but she has embraced the role so it is not a source of conflict for her. Gena describes the realm of her influence as over "a pretty good deal of money" (Gena, personal interview, 3/14/22). Gena conducts an annual needs assessment, and then the teachers vote, or the expressed needs are taken to the school leadership team to reach consensus. Gena says that it is critical to know what is going on in the building, and to know the needs of the teachers. Daisy's experience is different. She feels "very much out of a leadership role" in regards to technology budget decisions. Daisy feels as though that level of decision-making should be hers, and this is a source of role conflict for her.

Role conflict with other certified positions was reported, as well. Carley said that she used to instruct most of the professional development to her teachers in the building, but that now this role was mostly performed by a new position that was added, the instructional coach:

I think that what happens often, not necessarily just in our district, but what I am kind of observing is, unfortunately, they farm out jobs. They'll contract people to come in and do things and you kind of think to yourself, why didn't they just get one of us to do it?

(Daisy, personal interview, 3/25/22).

Some of the teachers at Evelyn's high school have told that they do not need her to teach a lesson on research databases because they can teach the same content themselves. Her response is that she is a specialist in this area. Joanne feels as though the classroom teachers should be sharing

responsibility for teaching digital citizenship with the school librarian: “the teachers should be whipping that into a frenzy” (Joanne, personal interview, 3/22/22).

Q3: Responses to multi-role work environments

How, if at all, do school librarians respond to multi-role work environments to ensure continued success?

The data collected across twelve interview sessions from the six middle and high school librarians revealed that multi-role work environments are inherent to the current positions, and they accept them in practice because the local context of one's role is accepted. Their role(s) are personal to their experience, thus the emphasis on building relationships and advocating for one's own position. With the exception of high school librarian Ally, the school librarians believe that if they accept employment in a different school, their school librarian role(s) would look quite different, and they would again personalize, adapt and advocate for the role(s) accordingly. Ally's responses were exceptional because she believes that the school librarian's role is in the process of being standardized, thus her responses were more generic in navigating a course forward but also the most passionate and defensive in some ways. I found her analogy of the school librarian to a utility person or player in athletics (she is a tennis coach) as the most refreshing and poignant response across all of the interviews. In two words, she summed up her response to evolution of the role – be prepared to go into any role anywhere.

Interestingly, Ally was the only one of the six who had previously collaborated with a teacher from Apex, albeit their pre-existing blended model. When those students were preparing for National History Day, she went to their location and taught them a research lesson. She was receptive to the future possibilities of collaborating with Apex Virtual faculty. Perhaps thinking ahead to standardization of the school librarian's role(s), Ally predicts a resource library that all of the district's school librarians contribute to, a shared video catalog. Even though she predicts the outcome to be standardized, she considers a way through creation of the shared video catalog

that each school librarian could make a personalized contribution. Ally also believes in focusing on the core business of librarianship as roles and work environments proliferate: “I do really try to focus on the reading and the availability of the things that the kids want” (Ally, personal interview, 3/17/22).

I did not sense that school librarians had fully processed the omission of a school librarian’s defined role from Apex Virtual’s structure: “I’m so glad we had that [initial] interview, because it made me think about [Apex Virtual]” (Carley, personal interview, 3/28/22). They are innovators though within the multi-role environments that touch their lives daily. Evelyn has set up a Google Classroom for library services and pertinent communications for 200 of Apex Academy’s blended students that are zoned to her homeschool. During the emergency learning phase of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, Evelyn initiated a curbside book checkout and circulated almost 100 books. Joanne continues a procedure begun during the pandemic, maintaining a Google Form for Apex Academy’s blended students or any of her students to request books.

Carley’s strategy for managing multi-role work environments is to pick one or two innovative ideas to focus on for her teachers for the school year. She believes that by narrowing her focus, a collaboration effort leads to more buy-in when teachers are not overwhelmed with new rollouts. Carley also challenges teachers to think about why they want to implement a new technology, asking them if it meets their standard, and if not, proposing to find something that works better. Carley prioritizes the human element of the role, however:

Make your space a place that people feel comfortable, where they know that they can come to in a time of need, and you’ll just be the heartbeat of the school and you can’t go

wrong when you're in that role. And then advocate, advocate, advocate (Carley, personal interview, 3/28/2022).

Gena also elevates the significance of the person fulfilling the school librarian's role over the role itself:

Legends in our community...taught me early on, they taught me to be a resource, you've got to make yourself a resource, a book isn't a resource to you. And if you can't make yourself a resource, then you're not going to be needed. You have to make yourself valuable (Gena, personal interview, 3/14/22).

Responses reflected that between initial and follow-up interviews, the group had begun to process the omission of a defined school librarian's role for Apex Virtual, and were more reflective on this omission by the follow-up interview. For example, in her follow-up interview, Gena proposed that a school librarian could serve in a de facto co-teacher role for an Apex Virtual classroom teacher, such as by posing critical thinking questions to the class group. This is an embedded librarianship role. In middle school librarian Daisy's follow-up interview, she described an embedded librarianship role, as well:

I have kind of embedded myself in our reading remediation classes, they're an actual class that the child goes to. The reason I have done that is because the teacher has a lot more freedom, they don't have to stick rigidly to the pacing guides...[the teacher] gets to create stuff, but I've gotten to have a hand in creating content for them, and it's been amazing (Daisy, personal interview, 3/25/22).

Middle school librarians Joanne and Gena similarly recognized the capacity for school librarians to carve new roles in the virtual environment by teaching self-regulation skills to Apex Virtual students. Gena noted the timely response that a current need exists for teaching Apex

Virtual students executive function skills and time management skills. Joanne offered a humorous example that most persons have experienced in the virtual space since the beginning of the pandemic:

You have to have the etiquette to do it online...whether it is turning your camera on when you're talking to somebody, or someone not talking into the void...actually be there so you can respond back to them. Without the etiquette, the whole thing falls apart...sometimes [the students] do have the [laptop] camera on, but it is facing the ceiling so you are watching the fans spin round and round (Joanne, personal interview, 3/22/22).

The school librarians also expressed concerns that could be considered hard line responses to multi-role environments, which as a participant-researcher, I contextualize as responding to the threat of obsolescence. Carley questioned Apex Virtual's funding and her belief that the teaching of digital citizenship is required in that regard:

So if the school librarian does not have a defined active role in [Apex Virtual's] parameters...and I am making an assumption that their funding...goes through the county spending. Funding requires that you provide those digital citizenship courses that your students have to go through...and so if you want that, that money to fund your technology, and your Internet and all that stuff you are supposed to prove that you have something in place for your schools in your system (Carley, personal interview, 3/28/22).

Joanne made it clear that she would fight for her position:

I do not want my job to go away. I know what happens when you sit back and do nothing, right? You lose your position, and I refuse. I want this job the rest of my life. And if that means I've got to chase them down at Apex Virtual and say 'Hey, who's the

English teacher? What is their name? Let me get their email. Hey, how can I help you?

Let me help you (Joanne, personal interview, 3/22/22).

Gena and Carley both raised the issue of equity of library services in considering Apex Virtual's structure. Gena stated: "I would definitely be advocating that they need a librarian over there because those kids deserve the same things that my kids and your kids have" (Gena, personal interview, 3/21/22). Carley's thoughts are that the success of Apex Virtual's remote-synchronous K-12 setting will force school librarians to strive for equity in the new instructional setting, ensuring that 24/7 digital access to resources is available and comparable. Also, she believes the conversation will advance as to how to have protocols in place for Apex Virtual students to acquire comparable print materials. Daisy's response to Apex Virtual was conciliatory, and ever mindful of the political nature of school librarians' work: "If we are inching, we are doing well. We just have to be moving forward" (Daisy, personal interview, 3/18/22).

Chapter 5: Discussion

The final chapter of this study will provide a summary of the research findings, a discussion of the findings relating to the literature, implications for both school librarians and school administrators, and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this phenomenological research study is to explore multi-role perceptions, experiences, and responses as they evolve for school librarians from the disruptive diversification of instructional settings, and related impacts to those multi-role perceptions such as role conflict and/or role strain.

Summary of Research Findings

Initial and follow-up interviews were conducted with three middle school and three high school librarians over the course of a month in March 2022. The length of each of the twelve interviews was between 30-45 minutes, providing for rich data collection. A challenge within this data collection process, as a researcher, was to employ the technique of bracketing while simultaneously ask relevant follow-questions within a semi-structured interview format. My technique, therefore, was to base follow-up questions on the participants' provided context rather than my background knowledge.

Three major themes emerged from the interviews: the local context of each school librarian's role(s), the ongoing effects of the pandemic on the role(s), and perceived tensions within the evolution of each school librarian's role(s). Of these three, the responses reflected that the pandemic remains a backdrop for every aspect of school life in the 2021-2022 school year and every aspect of planning for the 2022-2023 school year. So overwhelming was the pandemic to the context of the data, whether or not the actual word was utilized by the participants in their descriptions, the pandemic's designation of 'antagonist' was appropriate to capturing the essence of the participants' experience. This was an unexpected finding of the study, as I expected a

single, tangible result of the pandemic, the launch of the Apex Virtual remote-synchronous instructional setting, to have provided the greatest context to the study. The pandemic itself, however, continues to have a reach much deeper and broader than Apex Virtual alone in capturing the essence of the school librarians' role experiences.

In making meaning from the study's results, the collective sense leans towards standardization of the school librarian's role(s) with a centralized instructional technology department structure. Anticipation is ever-present towards concepts such as a shared online resource catalog, a shared e-book selection available district-wide, and centralized decision-making. The school librarians expressed this sentiment as the fundamental essence of their lived experience in multiple ways. First, they provided examples of standardization efforts already underway, such as with allowed technology tools and centralized district resources. Second, they provided examples of limited technology leadership capabilities within their schools, requiring deference on critical decision-making to the instructional technology department. Third, they expressed skepticism that a dedicated online school librarian will be hired for Apex Virtual; and, they expressed uncertainty as to whether their role(s) will bounce back to pre-pandemic traditional expectations, or if they are on a new trajectory towards utility-person status.

The group did not view the implementation of the Apex Virtual remote-synchronous model without a dedicated school librarian as a 'five-alarm fire.' None questioned if the setting was simultaneously underway elsewhere in the country, and in employing the technique of bracketing, I did not lead them towards any overt cause for concern. The interview questions were designed to draw out their own perceptions of their role if they chose to talk about it, but it was possible for them to reflect on Apex Virtual through the eyes of the students, and this was the perspective that most of them expressed. They talked about Apex Virtual in terms of student

equity, in terms of faculty equity, in terms of funding and likely standardization of resources, but concern was not overt over loss of that position. Concern was overt towards the trend of standardization.

Returning to the backdrop of the pandemic, observable student learning loss weighed heaviest on the school librarians' minds. In this context, the school librarians are processing what their role in the near future will be, and they anticipate fulfilling a critical role in their individual schools in implementing a back-to-basics literacy program. The critical need that they are experiencing in real time holds more urgency for them than a 'slippery-slope' idea of Apex Virtual opening without a dedicated school librarian. For this reason, their demeanor was one of grit and determination with an attitude of at-the-ready role fulfillment for whatever work is necessary to get their students back on track, as they are experiencing it.

Discussion of Findings Relating to Literature

In this discussion, findings from the data are related to the relevant literature in the areas of the school librarian as an instructional partner, technology leader, information literacy specialist, and innovator defining their own emerging roles within school librarianship. Understanding that many features of the above roles overlap, the instructional partnership role, the most traditional and recognized of school librarian roles, has receded the most during the data collection phase of this study. In Church's (2010) perception study of principals, 94% indicated that school librarians should serve on the school improvement team. This study's data aligned with Church's data point, with 83%, or five of the six school librarians (all except Joanne), currently serving on their school's improvement team. Church (2010) found that only 44% of principals indicated that school librarians should have access to student assessment data. While two of the six school librarians serve a current role involving assessment, their roles are

procedural, not interpretive. One participant provided the only example of raw data in her responses, asserting that only 39% of students at her middle school are currently reading at or above grade level. With this exception, none of the other participants described a role in which they are interpreting and adjusting practice based on assessment data.

Results from all six school librarians aligned with Lupton's 2016 findings and Golden's (2020) findings that the school librarian made the role valuable, not the role itself. Gena concurred with Lupton (2016) and Golden (2020), stating: "you've got to make yourself a resource, a book isn't a resource" (Gena, personal interview, 3/14/22). Through rich description of the many roles that each librarian serves, all provided data indicating agreement with Lupton (2016) that one's role is dependent on the jurisdiction. The dominant role of the participants during yet another pandemic-inflicted year is that of substitute teacher, and all agree that this role is in fulfillment of a critical need and assigned by the principal. Golden's (2020) research finding that the school library is occasionally viewed by students as a place for punishment, thus providing a barrier to teachers initiating instructional partnerships, was validated by participant Joanne, who stated: "a lot of [students] need their timeouts...they just can't be in classrooms right now" (Joanne, personal interview, 3/17/22).

Antrim and Robins (2012) found that school librarians were serving in non-traditional roles such as testing and data entry, and these findings were supported by results from this study that revealed 92 different ways that school librarians describe their own roles. Due to the pandemic and resulting substitute teacher role fulfillment, none of the school librarians described roles involving new instructional interventions from the literature such as Response to Instruction (RtI) cited by Antrim and Robins (2012). The group was in consensus that the concept of embedded librarianship, a fully integrated teacher-librarian partnership role, was not

feasible at scale as they are still navigating effects of the pandemic. While receptive to the idea, time management was cited as the greatest barrier, with one participant even suggesting that in fulfillment of current roles, she wonders why school librarians are not required to work additional days on the lengthened school calendar of administrators and school counselors. Aligned to the idea of standardization, two participants said that a pre-recording of modules might be possible in the form of a one-stop shop of embedded librarianship, and this idea was mentioned as a singular component of embedded librarianship by Boyer and Kelly (2014). Beck's (2015) finding that school librarian roles were undefined for fully virtual schools aligns with Apex's structure at launch in the 2021-2022 school year, for which there is currently no defined role.

The study's findings in regards to the school librarian's role experiences with technology leadership were consistent with mixed messaging as coined by Johnston (2015a). With one participant exception who reported little role conflict or role strain in her technology leadership charge, all reported incidents of role conflict or role strain with other positions either in their building or at the district level. One participant noted that the instructional coach led most of the professional development that she used to conduct, a phenomenon noted by Lewis (2019).

Again aligned to the idea of standardization, four participants noted that the district's instructional technology specialists selected the approved technology tools and held full decision-making authority as to which tools are accessible as they sought a role in that process. This phenomenon was noted by Lewis (2019), Johnston (2015a), and Baker et al. (2020). The sentiment among the group was that while technology implementation decisions are made at the district level, the school librarians work with their teachers on a day-to-day basis and better understand their needs. Standardization of K-12 library resources and services at the district level

is not consistent with the literature examined for this particular study, although the realignment may be found in related literature or empirically in practice.

The information literacy specialist role is the one that the school librarians identified as most dynamic and evolutionary to new and familiar instructional settings. As the strains of the pandemic continue to influence their role(s) in their familiar instructional settings, most of the school librarians reported that their information literacy specialist role was continuing with class instruction in technology tools. Through the school librarians' insistence that this role continues, their work is aligned to the importance granted this role by Cherinet (2018), Phillips and Anderson (2020), and Reed and Oslund (2018).

As the conversations continued about Apex, participants provided examples of how the information literacy specialist role could be applicable within Apex's structure, even if an Apex dedicated school librarian position was not implemented. Consistent with standardization, two participants proposed the idea of pre-recorded modules covering research skills for Apex students, while a third participant proposed a shared video library of technology tutorials. Joanne agreed with Phillips and Lee (2019), and Crary (2019), that classroom teachers should be teaching information literacy alongside school librarians: "the teachers should be whipping that into a frenzy" (Joanne, personal interview, 3/22/22).

Participants described emerging roles for school librarians that they were implementing into practice, with most of the roles evolving from the pandemic. Bishop's (2021) description of 'pandemic pedagogy' was echoed throughout the group as they described their various substitute teaching roles. Cherinet's (2018) study proposing the teaching of soft skills such as cultural intelligence and negotiation skills was concurred by three participants as a significant use of their time since students returned full-time to the buildings in the 2021-2022 school year.

The teaching of soft skills to students was an area that the school librarians saw as an immediate need for role fulfillment, most often mentioned in tandem with students' loss of social norms and behavioral expectations due to the pandemic. Consideration of resilience as a teachable skill to new faculty within a mentoring role, as mentioned by Soulen and Wine (2018), is certainly an avenue with potential for school librarians that informs the effectiveness of teachers and influences their evaluations. SSD teaches a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum, of which school librarians are a part, and the question was raised by a participant whether or not Apex Virtual students are receiving this instruction. Teaching SEL aligns to the study by Hughes-Hassell and Stivers (2015), proposing that school librarians implement culturally relevant pedagogical practices.

The participants were not questioned about Apex Virtual with the expectation they would hold knowledge of disruptive innovation theory; as an interviewer, I did not reveal that SSD was not an anomaly, although I would have informed them of the known Frederick, MD example if asked. Rather, I was seeking clues through their responses as to how they were experiencing the new instructional setting that could be compared against the relevant literature. Results were consistent that participants could not design a practical role for school librarians in the new instructional setting's structure, other than a fully virtual role(s) that is inconsistent with the district's move to standardization. Tabbah and Maritz (2019) note the potential of disruptive innovations to eliminate jobs, so this characteristic appears to support the literature. Metko (2018) proposed that school librarians embrace evolution in their role(s) or "risk irrelevance" (p. 86). The school librarians expressed initial skepticism about Apex Virtual in various ways, noting sustainability issues such as teacher overload, students' social need for face-to-face learning, and most importantly, students' need for face-to-face accountability. At the end of the

first year, it is too soon to know if the school librarians will seek out a role with Apex Virtual or experience role irrelevance. Therefore, at this time, the school librarians' experiences are not consistent with Metko's (2018) assertion. Findings are consistent, however, with Metko (2018) regarding uncertainty over the new instructional setting's staying power.

Consistent with Lewis (2004), results from the school librarians were that Apex Virtual is a new service model that does not maintain existing organizational relationships. Until a change is implemented to add a school librarian position, the faculty-school librarian partner relationship has been interrupted, the student-school librarian relationship has been interrupted, and equity of available instructional resources to both faculty and students has been interrupted as pointed out by several of the participants.

Implications for Current School Library Practitioners

School librarians are adept at advocating for their positions under traditional brick-and-mortar environments. The challenge is the pivot that lies ahead as instructional settings continue to diversify. School librarians should reflect on their role(s) during the pandemic years, and approach their professional path forward with a proactive position. Results of the study revealed that school librarians personalize their role; a practitioner's trajectory, therefore, may be different for each school librarian. In broad terms, school librarians understand the inter-dependence of their role(s) within the context of the local school and district, and should continue to engage with their professional colleagues outside of school librarianship – administrators, classroom teachers, and instructional technology specialists. School librarians should be routinely asking tough questions of their district offices: "Are there any new instructional settings, programs or practices under consideration by this district, and if so, what is the potential role(s) of the school library position?" "How is equity of resources for both students and faculty ensured in this new

delivery model?” School librarians should locate their district’s 5-year Strategic Plan and be able to communicate their role(s) within it.

The school librarians in this study revealed empathy to their respective school administrations regarding the pandemic-era chasm between the traditional role(s) and atypical role(s) that they have served. The utility that school librarians have demonstrated during the pandemic years strongly positions them for critical role(s) within new instructional settings that surely lie ahead. School librarians should leverage this experience with an emphasis on teamwork, and if they do so, the profession will continue to endure, and evolve.

Implications for School Administrators

The school librarians in this study expressed deep concern regarding the issue of pandemic-related learning loss that they are observing in professional practice. They believe that it is the greatest challenge ahead for schools, profound enough to engulf a generation. They are willing and ready to assume a critical role in literacy instruction that they foresee as urgent. Before new positions are funded for the hiring of reading interventionists and literacy coaches, etc., the school librarians want administrations to consider them to fulfill these roles.

The school librarians also observe behavioral and social learning loss in their students. They are aware that schools are currently emphasizing social and emotional needs of students, and this objective aligns with the trajectory of the school librarianship profession as a whole. Fostering connections between students and reading or students and inquiry has always been at the heart of school librarians’ work. As schools elevate Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to meet critical needs on the other side of the pandemic, school librarians already have the tools in their toolbox. They seek utilization of their skill sets in personalizing the connections between students and school.

School librarians met the critical need of substituting classes virtually and in-person on a substantial scale during the pandemic. In doing so, they recognized a new skill for post-pandemic learning, supported in the literature - virtual learners must learn *how* to attend school in the online environment, in addition to mastering content (Borup & Stimson, 2018, p. 1). School administrators should consider school librarians for this role. Boyer and Kelly (2014) propose that “Libraries have always been centers of learning *how* to learn. Constructivist tenets of online learning match those of inquiry and problem-based learning associated with information fluency and library instruction” (p. 367). This connection suggests a natural pedagogical match between the school librarian and a new instructional setting such as the remote-synchronous learning environment of Apex Virtual.

Recommendations for Future Research

In considering future research areas and implications on practice, results of this study are consistent with the COVID-19 pandemic serving as a demarcation line in K-12 research. Participants were unable to speak of the recent years with any continuity of experience exclusive of this study’s antagonist. Future researchers in K-12 will need to differentiate which side of the demarcation line is being referenced in regards to studies on professional role(s), student achievement data and/or lived experience. Areas for future research are prolific. As mentioned in the previous section’s literature by Borup and Stimson (2018), and from the results of this study on the need for teaching students transliteracy skills, teaching students *how* to attend school remotely is a new role opportunity for school librarians. Seifert (2020) examined the subject of synchronous remote teaching practices during the early stages of the pandemic, through a study of pre-service teachers’ preparation for such. Seifert (2020) acknowledges the “unique characteristics of synchronous teaching” as holding “techno-pedagogical practices” (p. 98). As

school librarians must consider how to evolve their role to establish relevancy within the new K-12 remote-synchronous learning environment, this capacity for an embedded role is present and offers a natural evolution.

Statti et al. (2021) conducted a role study during the 2020-2021 school year regarding the lasting impact of COVID-19 to the coming decade in K-12 education. While Statti's (2021) study did not include school librarians in their study of classroom teachers, administrators and U.S. education policy, as a mixed-methods role study it is an excellent example of the type of research school librarians can pursue. The study incorporates pandemic learning loss as a variable: "According to the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.), some states have adopted *Bridge Programs* to address potential learning loss" (Statti et al., 2021, p. 250).

This study's literature review on emerging roles for school librarians as well as results of this study revealed an opportunity for further research on school librarians' workplace experiences and emotional responses in the workplace. Methodologies supporting these types of studies in school librarianship are the underutilized methods of phenomenology and autoethnography. An example of this type of study was a phenomenological examination conducted by Kendrick (2017) of morale among academic librarians. Similar to this study, Kendrick (2017) considers "role conflict and ambiguity" (p. 848) in the study's literature review. Conducted pre-pandemic, this study would be interesting to replicate post-pandemic and applied within the K-12 setting.

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Appendix A

"Look-Fors" to Support Balanced Instruction for Instructional Technology

The primary purpose of instructional technology in ██████ County Schools is the belief that technology is not what drives school improvement but that it is a tool that enables and accelerates it. The use of instructional technology supports the Balanced Models of Instruction for all content areas by providing opportunities for students to enrich and extend their understanding of content knowledge and skills while making connections both within and across content areas and with real-world situations. The role of Instructional Technology is to assist and support stakeholders in the use of technology to achieve our commitment of ensuring success through greater flexibility, enhanced productivity, increased support of standards-based instruction.

Look-Fors	Classroom Conditions	Teacher Behaviors	Student Behaviors
Balance between Digital and Print Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are students engaged in meaningful and challenging learning activities that address their unique characteristics and needs? <input type="checkbox"/> Are students leveraging a variety of digital and print resources to learn content and demonstrate what they know? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Texts assigned exhibit exceptional craft and thought and/or provide useful information and timely/automatic feedback. 1) <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers design learning experiences that include a variety of multimedia rich resources (i.e. digital worksheet, infographics, videos, virtual primary sources) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Students are utilizing print and digital core resources. <input type="checkbox"/> Students use a variety of print and digital resources to create, access, and share findings.

Look-Fors	Classroom Conditions	Teacher Behaviors	Student Behaviors
Student Engagement in the 4 C's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are students excited about their work and how it relates to others and/or real world experiences? <input type="checkbox"/> Do students receive individualized feedback and support via targeted teacher feedback, targeted peer feedback, and conferencing? <input type="checkbox"/> Do teachers provide a variety of opportunities that allow students to collaborate in meaningful ways? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers use classroom tasks prompts, or questions that require students to apply, analyze, evaluate and/or create. 3) <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers provide structure during each lesson phase 4) <input type="checkbox"/> so ensuring students are accountable for doing the thinking and the work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> All students are engaged in productive and purposeful work throughout the class period. <input type="checkbox"/> Engage in self-directed learning fueled by individual student interests, abilities, or learning styles. <input type="checkbox"/> Students have the opportunity to create original artifacts using various technologies to demonstrate mastery.

"Look-Fore" to Support Balanced Instruction for Instructional Technology

Look-For	Teacher Objectives	Teacher Behaviors	Student Behaviors
Organization of online content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are learning targets available for students? <input type="checkbox"/> Is content structured in an orderly and user-friendly manner? <input type="checkbox"/> Are assignments posted in a timely manner for students? <input type="checkbox"/> Are links to materials needed for assignments all found in the same location? <input type="checkbox"/> Do the student rosters reflect current enrollment? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5) <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Classroom includes organization by topic, standard, or unit. 6) <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers use settings to encourage only meaningful conversations in visible areas (i.e. stream, comments, etc.) 7) <input type="checkbox"/> Assignments and due dates are posted within the structure and timeline. 8) <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers ensure all links work and videos/sites are not blocked for students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Students use their Google Calendar and Google Drive effectively. <input type="checkbox"/> Students interact with peers and teachers by responding appropriately to questions and private comments. <input type="checkbox"/> Students ensure completed assignments are turned in properly.
Utilization of the SAMR model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are students engaged in learning opportunities and experiences that foster 21st Century Skills? <input type="checkbox"/> Are students innovative and creative in their work? <input type="checkbox"/> Are the assignments/projects assigned moving through the SAMR model as possible? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9) <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers create learning opportunities that include critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and communication. 10) <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers create assignments/projects that encourage students to use problem-solving skills rather than rote memory. 11) <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers understand when it is appropriate to use the different levels of SAMR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Students use technology to transform the learning experience <input type="checkbox"/> Students create products or demonstrate synthesis of existing material with technology that otherwise would not be possible.
Digital Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How do we balance digital media use? <input type="checkbox"/> How does online activity affect the digital footprint of yourself and others? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the classroom a safe environment where students are free to propose unusual ideas without criticism? <input type="checkbox"/> How can we act with empathy and positivity when we are online? <input type="checkbox"/> How do you de-escalate digital drama, so it does not go too far? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12) <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers use a balance of online and offline activities. 13) <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers encourage students to take responsibility for how they affect the digital footprints of themselves and others. 14) <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers create classrooms that have an established culture of empathy and mutual interest that both teacher and students have agreed to have the most success with these lessons. 15) <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers monitor the student digital workspace through GoGuardian (3rd - 12th grade students) and appropriately responds when necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Students have the opportunity to participate in a healthy balance of online and offline activities. <input type="checkbox"/> Students consider the benefits and risks of online sharing and explore how a digital persona can affect one's sense of self, reputation, and relationships. <input type="checkbox"/> Students understand the effects of digital drama, cyberbullying, and hate speech on both themselves and their larger communities. They will explore how individual actions – negative and positive, intentional and unintentional – can affect their peers and their broader communities.

Appendix B

School Librarian Interview Protocol #1

Interview #: _____

Date: _____

Script:

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Lisa Wright and I am a graduate student at Kennesaw State University conducting an interview for my doctoral dissertation. This interview will take about 45 minutes and will include 18 questions regarding your perceptions and experiences of the school librarian's role(s) within Summit School District (SSD) (pseudonym). I would like your permission to audio record this interview so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know and we will stop. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used only for class and educational purposes. At this time I would like to ask for your verbal consent and also inform you that your participation in this interview also implies your consent. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

1. How many years of experience do you have as a school librarian? In what settings? Can you provide a narrative of your experiences?
2. Describe any experience you have had as a classroom teacher.
3. What level do you currently serve as a school librarian? (elementary, middle, or high)
4. How many of your school's students do you currently serve face-to-face (F2F)?
5. How many of your school's students do you currently serve through blended instruction?
6. How many of your school's students do you currently serve through Apex?

Grand Tour Question

7. Describe your thoughts about your students this school year, their needs, and how they are currently influencing the work you do.

Role(s) Questions

8. How has your perception of the school librarian been shaped throughout your career?
9. What are the role(s) of the school librarian in today's schools?
10. The current emphasis in my school is _ (Church, 2010, p. 32).
11. How do you feel about this statement: "I ensure that the school library media center's mission continues to evolve as technology changes" (Luetkemeyer, 2017, p. 82).
12. Describe your role in comparison to the district's instructional technology specialists.
13. How is the COVID-19 pandemic and the launch this school year (2021-22) of Apex's permanent remote-synchronous learning option, the virtual option, further transitioning the role of the school librarian?
14. Considering the cyclical name changes of the school library profession, i.e. librarian to media specialist, teacher-librarian and school librarian, how do you perceive the appropriateness of the profession's current title to diverse instructional settings?
15. From an instructional standpoint only, how do you feel about the virtual option of remote-synchronous learning for SSD students?
16. Now that you have served as a school librarian in a remote learning environment due to COVID-19, do you believe that successful remote learning requires students to utilize a different skill set than successful face-to-face learning, i.e. students need to learn *how* to learn remotely?
17. Describe your experiences with technology leadership.
18. Have you collaborated with a virtual Apex Academy (remote-synchronous) teacher? If so, how, and if not yet, how could collaboration occur?

Thank you for your time and participation.

Appendix C

School Librarian Interview Protocol #2

Interview #: _____

Date: _____

Script:

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Lisa Wright and I am a graduate student at Kennesaw State University conducting an interview for my doctoral dissertation. This interview will take about 45 minutes and will include 15 questions regarding your perceptions and experiences of the school librarian's role(s) within Summit School District (SSD) (pseudonym). I would like your permission to audio record this interview so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know and we will stop. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used only for class and educational purposes. At this time I would like to ask for your verbal consent and also inform you that your participation in this interview also implies your consent. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

Interview Questions

Role(s) Questions (continued from Interview #1)

1. Are you a member of your school's Leadership Team?
2. How do you strive for equity of library services between students across chosen instructional settings?
3. How do you describe your role in support of virtual (remote-synchronous) instruction?
4. In what ways do your roles differ in your different instructional contexts? (F2F, blended, Apex).
5. The term 'embedded librarianship' is relatively new within K-12 dialogue (2015-present). When you hear this terminology, what does it mean to you?
6. Could you perceive school librarians having a role in virtual (remote-synchronous) course design? If so, in what ways?
7. How do you perceive remote-synchronous students learning new digital literacy competencies?

8. How can school librarians support virtual teachers in implementing the Checklist for New Teacher's Virtual Classrooms Observations (see Appendix D)?
9. How can school librarians support virtual teachers in implementing the Look-Fors to Support Balanced Instruction for Instructional Technology (see Appendix A)?
10. "Are there any activities in which you'd like to be more involved than you are right now? If so, please tell us about the barriers that hinder your involvement" (Luetkemeyer, 2017, p. 83).
11. Describe emerging school librarianship services in 5 years.
12. If 100% of the students at your school choose virtual (remote-synchronous) learning next year, how will your role(s) change?
13. Do you ever find that your various roles conflict with one another or create a strain or burden on you? Can you give an example or two?
14. As instructional settings diversify, how, if at all, have school librarians experienced role conflict and/or role strain?

Closing Question

15. In conclusion, is there anything else you would like to share regarding the nature of evolving roles of school librarians in diverse instructional settings?

Thank you for your time and participation.

