

SOCIAL CAPITAL EXPERIENCES OF SOLO MIDDLE SCHOOL LIBRARIANS AT A  
PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT IN SOUTH TEXAS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Doctor of Education

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by

Jessica Michelle Lilly

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## **DEDICATION**

The number of loved ones I wish to dedicate this work to is long, yet all have my love, appreciation, and awe for being there for me by word, deed, and prayer. To my husband Sean Garner Hughes, I can express only the tip of the magnitude of appreciation I have for my biggest cheerleader. He provided me with quiet pressure and undying support as I struggled and celebrated through various stages of progress. He is my soul mate, my best friend, and my compass through life's joys and challenges. I love you, Sean. Thank you for being the best husband a doctoral student, or anyone, could ever want or need.

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## **ABSTRACT**

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### **Purpose**

The results of a pilot study (Lilly Hughes, 2013) I completed in 2013 sparked my interest in investigating the social capital activities of the solo middle school librarian. I investigated a sample of middle school solo librarians in a large Texas school district as they shared their participation and experiences with librarian-to-librarian social capital. First, the social capital activities in which solo middle school librarians and other librarians participate were identified. Second, the social capital activities in which solo middle school librarians participate with other solo librarians within their school district were identified. Third, the factors that influenced the solo middle school librarian's ability to participate in social capital activities were examined.

### **Method**

A qualitative approach was used to determine solo middle school librarians' opinions about social capital experiences at a public school district in south Texas. A phenomenological approach was used because this study involves real-life, contemporary settings. Five solo middle school librarians were interviewed in this study. Recorded, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the solo middle school librarians at each school or home allowing the participants to describe their feelings about and perceptions of these experiences. Using the participants' responses in the interviews, I interpreted the data to understand the phenomenon.

## **Results**

A high degree of consensus across the 5 solo middle school librarians led to the themes of collegiality, professional organizations, principal support, librarians are teachers, and isolation. Implications for practice included librarian advocacy for principal support of additional support staff. Findings relevant for policy included the need for updated state library standards. The need for increased library staffing and opportunities for solo middle school librarian to experience social capital opportunities was confirmed. Not all participants in this study value all social capital experiences. The same was discovered true for each participant regarding the benefit of social capital experiences provided by professional organizations and social media on their professional practice. All participants agreed some form of self-imposed restrictions have been made regarding involvement in social capital experiences because each is alone on the job, which restricts their time and stamina to engage with other school librarians.

**KEY WORDS:** Social capital, School librarian, Teacher isolation, Library staffing, Collegiality, Phenomenology

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Quality public schools are drivers of performance, and their effectiveness affects our culture and economics. An equitable education for all students requires a large fiscal investment from taxpayers. In addition, over the years, higher performance standards, beginning with *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education) in 1983, have caused government officials, parents, and the business community to demand increased student achievement (Pil & Leana, 2009). The emphasis on school-level performance on standardized assessments encourages educators to consider student academic achievement as “a collective effort across the school rather than as a solo endeavor by individual teachers within the school” (Leana & Pil, 2006, p. 355). Each year schools across the nation strive to surpass the previous year’s student academic performance by educating a future innovative and competitive workforce (Manafy & Gautschi, 2011).

Historically, teaching students in the United States has been an individual professional endeavor (Warren, 1975). Teachers worked alone while planning their lessons and taught students in the singular classroom (Pil & Leana, 2009). As per Pil and Leana (2009), “enhancing teachers’ human capital—such as their classroom competency and experience—has been a subject of particular attention from policy makers (p. 1101). Now, teaching is a growing social endeavor (Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004; Healy, 2011; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011) because teachers (a) plan lessons with others; (b) collaborate with campus, district, and third-party professional organizations; (c) attend professional development workshops; and (d) co-teach with other educational

professionals (Pil & Leana, 2009). Despite the growing number of socially-centered teaching activities, the research literature is lacking upon teacher social capital, or networking, collaboration, and relationship-building. Concurrently, growing evidence exists that teacher social capital positively affects student achievement as much as teacher human capital (Healy, 2011; Pil & Leana, 2009; Plagens, 2010). When a teacher has an instructional question or one regarding content, he or she talks to other teachers (Leana, 2010). As educator Richard F. Elmore (2000) stated, “isolation is the enemy of improvement” (p. 20). Collaboration between individual teachers and teams of teachers requires communication and collegiality to enhance student learning (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012).

Now, communication is considered essential in every school because education is seen as taking place in a social atmosphere. The process that joins all stakeholders together in the school is considered essential (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012). Purposeful communication between teachers focused on teaching strategies and instructional practices can enhance student learning and achievement (Leana, 2010). With federal and state public leaders raising academic expectations higher each year to elevate the level of student readiness to compete in a global economy, investigation of teacher communication and how the communication affects student achievement is paramount. By collaborating with other educators, teachers grow professionally, improve their teaching skills, and increase their knowledge of content, thus providing better lessons and environment for students (Zepeda, 2004). Students then benefit from enriched learning opportunities. As high-stakes testing and rising standards are the 21st-century reality, all teachers must work together to support student achievement.

One teacher who is overlooked in the literature is the school librarian. In Texas, a certified school librarian must also be a teacher. Furthermore, many times the school librarian is alone in the library, and is referred to as a solo librarian (Adams, 2011; Busch, 2011; Church & Reeve, 2011; Karabush & Pleviak, 2011; Nickel, 2011; Slusser, 2011; Woodard, 2011). If teachers exchange purposeful communication, focused on teaching strategies and instructional practices, that communication can enhance student learning and achievement (Leana, 2010), then purposeful communication between school librarians might also enhance student learning. Little (2006) stated the professional school librarian has been professionally trained and certificated, and the effective librarian has multiple options of professional support and development from a library network. Library leader Diane Oberg stated librarians “need to be aware of and utilize professional networks throughout their professional lives (Oberg, 2007, p. 342). In short, effective librarians participate in social capital because “it is active participation in the library...network that helps the specialist gain needed knowledge and expertise and continue to develop those sources of power and influence” (Little, 2006, p. 14). Moreover, research is even more deficient on investigating solo librarians’ social capital.

### **Problem Statement**

A surfeit of research (e.g. Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009; Pil & Leana, 2009; Plagens, 2010; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011) exists investigating the sophisticated kaleidoscope of teacher communication, or social capital, in K-12 public schools. More specifically, teacher social capital and its effect on student efficacy continue to be extensively investigated (Pil & Leana, 2009). As per Goe and Stickler (2008)

Teacher collegiality and the willingness to collaborate have received considerable attention in recent years as potential vehicles for improved student achievement... it is not possible to use these data to accurately measure the impact of *individual* teachers' collaborative skills on student achievement. (pp. 6-7)

The definitive meaning of teacher social capital, however, continues to be disputed, and is a multi-faceted, complex system (Bolino, Turnley, & Bloodgood, 2002; Coleman, 1988; Daly & Silver, 2008; Fu, 2004; Kilduff & Brass, 2010; Lin, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Plagens, 2010; Tsai, 2000; Tsang, 2009; Tzanakis, 2013; Watson & Papamarcos, 2002). The components and strategies of teacher social capital are extensive but not conclusive. Due to the lack of standards and definitions, teacher social capital is overlooked when professional educators investigate instructional quality (Leana, 2010) despite findings that teacher social capital does affect student achievement (Goe & Stickler, 2008; Penuel et al., 2009; Pil & Leana, 2009; Plagens, 2010; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011).

As previously mentioned, the school librarian is overlooked when discussing teacher social capital (Preer, 2001). Teachers teaming with other teachers are a critical step to enhance student improvement (Costello, 1987). Knowledge sharing and introductions to new instructional practices may benefit teachers learning (Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009) and student achievement (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). If purposeful communication between teachers focused on teaching strategies and instructional practices can enhance student learning and achievement (Leana, 2010), then purposeful communication between school librarians who in Texas must also be a teacher, should also enhance student learning.

The topic of school librarian social capital is confounded when the librarian is a solo librarian, and even more so when the library is understaffed according to library standards (Busch, 2011); thus, he or she is even more challenged to provide adequate services without at least a library clerk (Terrell, 2011). In Texas public schools, many librarians became solo librarians due to state-level budget cuts in 2011 (Districts Sue Texas Over Aid Formula, 2011). Before librarian personnel cuts, “Anytime a student, parent, or staff member had a need or concern, we could address it immediately because we had adequate staffing” (Terrell, 2011, p. 19). In Texas public schools, “cutting staff,” as stated by Busch (2011), means “cutting services” (p. 15). As one librarian stated:

Consider all the small daily tasks done in the background that contribute to the overall maintenance and outward credibility of the school library program. Computers up and running, books on shelves, equipment ready and available, furniture in place, databases and books selected and acquired, well-trained and helpful staff—all those ingredients and more create a school library that is ready to accommodate student research, recreational reading, best use of Web 2.0 applications, and student/teacher contacts. So many of my former clerk's responsibilities enabled me to address the instructional needs of students and staff. How would those jobs be accomplished without losing the instructional component of the school library? (Busch, 2011, p. 15). The school library, led by the state certified or licensed school librarian with support staff, can positively impact student achievement (PA School Library Project, et. al., 2012). A strong school library is staffed by a team of professionals, which includes clerical assistance (Kachel, 2011).

Some states, (e.g., Texas) established standards and guidelines school libraries strive to attain. Libraries and the school districts use the standards and guidelines to address (a) teaching and learning, (b) program leadership and management, (c) technology and information access, (d) library environment, (e) connections to the community, and (f) information science and librarianship. For each standard, goals and principles are evaluated by various components and identified as Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and Below Standard (*School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines for Texas*, 2005). However, according to the Texas Administrative Code, Title 13, Part 1, Chapter 4, (Texas State Library and Archives Commission, 2005), schools are not required to have a school library.

### **Purpose**

The results of a pilot study (Lilly Hughes, 2013) I completed in 2013 sparked my interest in investigating the social capital activities of the solo middle school librarian. I investigated a sample of middle school solo librarians in a large Texas school district as they shared their participation and experiences with librarian-to-librarian social capital. First, the social capital activities in which solo middle school librarians and other librarians participate were identified. Second, the social capital activities in which solo middle school librarians participate with other solo librarians within their school district were identified. Third, the factors that influenced the solo middle school librarian's ability to participate in social capital activities were examined.

### **Significance of the Study**

If purposeful communication between teachers focused on teaching strategies and instructional practices can enhance student learning and achievement (Leana, 2010), then



purposeful communication between school librarians should also enhance student learning. However, data and literature regarding investigating school librarian social capital is lacking (Schultz-Jones, 2009). Research and literature are even more deficient on investigating solo librarian social capital (Galoozis, 2014). If librarian-to-librarian social capital exists and may support student achievement, librarian social capital should not be overlooked by educators and stakeholders (Schultz-Jones, 2009). Continued research may assist school educators in discovering librarian social capital best practices for increased student achievement, which will benefit all educators' professional growth, instructional strategies, and leadership to increase student achievement. In addition, public school leaders may create library staffing that supports the state and national library standards, and provides professional opportunities for librarian solo capital to foster and grow. With more data and literature addressing the benefits of solo librarian social capital, informed policies and decision-making by educational leaders may follow.

### **Research Questions**

Focusing on five solo middle school librarians in a large suburban school district in south Texas, the three research questions addressed in this qualitative study were as follows:

1. How do solo middle school librarians perceive social capital experiences with other solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district?
2. How do solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district perceive social capital experiences with other school librarians outside of their large Texas school district?

3. How do solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district perceive factors that influence social capital experiences?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social capital theory and human capital are the two theoretical frameworks establishing the foundation for this qualitative study, as applied to the public middle school solo librarian (Putnam, 2000). Multiple social capital theories exist, and for this research study, the work of Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988), Granovetter (1973), Lin (1999), Portes (1998), and Putnam (2000) build the framework. As evident in the previous research, relationships matter in a person's life (Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1973; Howard, 2010; Johnston, Markle, & Arhar, 1988; Leana, 2010; Leana, 2011; Leana & Pil, 2006; Lin, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000; and Smith, 2009). For this study, a sense of community and networking was highlighted (Bourdieu, 1985; Lin, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Portes, 1998; and Smith, 2009) with a focus upon interpersonal attachments (Granovetter, 1973). Additionally, this study featured social capital and education on relationships (Putnam, 2000).

Educational practitioners and researchers (Costello, 1987; Dow, 2010; Goodlad, 1983a, 1983b; Johnson, Lustick, & Kim, 2011; Koechlin, Luhtala, & Loertscher, 2011; Lance, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Leana, 2010, 2011; Oberg, 2009; Penuel, & Riel, 2007; Penuel, et al., 2009; Plagens, 2010; Rosenholtz, 1985; Tsang, 2009; Tye, & Tye, 1984; Tyler, 1983; Uekawa, Aladjem, & Zhang, 2006; Van Maele, & Van Houtte, 2011) have increasingly focused on school improvement and school conditions that may increase student achievement and benefit instructional practice. Relationships between educators

through collaboration and formal and informal learning communities become an important component of school effectiveness (Healey, 2011). Within these relationships, “teachers can share expertise, observe one another’s instruction, critically examine teaching and learning, and develop collective norms and values” (Healey, 2011, p. 3). Social capital framework provides understanding of how teachers’ relationships affect their professionalism and how the relationships might relate to student achievement. In addition, recent investigation of teacher social capital reveals that principals can influence relationships with teachers (Healey, 2011).

### **Definitions**

The operational definitions used in the study are defined as follows:

**BLAB.** BLAB is a video chat application on social media. Topic driven conversations allow 2-4 people on air with live audience participation commenting on the side of the live or recorded video. Participants create a virtual room in which to talk, watch videos, or listen to music together (Blab.im, 2016).

**Human capital.** Human capital may be defined as “the ability, education, and training that people bring to a job” (Leana, 2010, p. 16).

**Isolation.** Isolation is the “feeling experienced by teachers that no one cares about them or what they do” (Robert, 1973, p. 4). A complex term with multiple perceptions by teachers, what one teacher may deem isolation another deems professional autonomy (Gaikwad & Brantley, 1992). Isolation may also be defined as “the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person’s network of social relations at work is deficient in some important ways, either quantitatively or qualitatively” (Dussault, et al., 1999, p. 944).

**Librarian-to-librarian.** Librarian-to-librarian means that one or more librarians communicate, network, or collaborate with another librarian or librarians.

**One-person library (OPL).** A one-person library (OPL) is the only professional librarian in a library, information or media center, or a specialized library serving specific clientele or providing specialized services and materials (Siess, 1997, 2006; St. Clair, 1997). An OPL may also be named a solo librarian, sole-charge librarian, or one-man band (Siess, 1999, 2006). The OPL performs all library duties, including but not limited to acquisitions; cataloging; circulation; and reference (Siess, 1999, 2006; St. Clair, 1997).

**Social capital.** Social capital may be circumscribed as a social network where stakeholders collaborate with each other, share resources, and support each other in providing learning opportunities that benefit all stakeholders (Minckler, 2011).

**Solo school librarian.** The solo school librarian may be defined as “a school librarian working alone—no paid clerk, aide, paraprofessional, or second librarian” (Church & Reeve, 2011, p. 6). He or she may work in a small school library where staff has always been one professional, in a library that once had clerical staff and/or another professional colleague, or in multiple school libraries as the only professional (Church & Reeve, 2011).

**Twenty-first century skills.** Twenty-first century skills is a framework for defining the skills and aptitudes students need to be academically, economically, and culturally successful in an era increasingly defined by information and technology. These skills include information, communications and technology literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, civic literacy, and global awareness (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012).

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations include the site of the study: one large suburban school district in south Texas. In addition, of the fourteen middle school solo librarians in the district, only librarians who have at least three concurrent years (beginning fall, 2011) of experience as a school librarian will be asked to participate. The small size of the group of middle school solo librarians will allow for trust and amity unreachable in a larger sampling. Last, data will be collected from a focus group interview, demographic information, and individual interviews in the phenomenological research design.

## **Limitations**

The first limitation in the study is that no consideration of the solo librarian's teaching experiences nor librarian experiences are investigated. The solo middle school librarian is required to have only two years teaching experience. However, for the study the solo middle school librarian must have at least three years of librarian experience. Various teaching and librarian experiences on different grades and for various amount of may impact the professional actions of the solo middle school librarian.

A second limitation in the study was that no consideration of the quality or credentials of the library preparation program in which the solo middle school librarian attended are investigated. For example, school librarian preparation programs may be endorsed by the American Library Association, provided completely online, provided entirely face-to-face, or taught by non-public school experienced professors. Each experience is different and impacts the quality of the education received by the librarian, and could impact quality of the library program.

A third limitation in the study was the amount of additional assistance the solo middle school librarian may receive. Some schools have many capable and reliable volunteers that assist with the daily clerical activities in the middle school library, and others do not. As a result, the solo middle school librarian's ability to provide services beyond the clerical can be negatively affected.

Last, a fourth limitation is that data from only one large urban school in south Texas will be collected. A small representative sample may limit the generalizability and transferability, as explained by Onwuegbuzie (2003), that without a large representative sample we may not apply our findings to the larger population, to solo librarians in that district, and to other school districts in Texas or the nation that are comparable in demographic data.

### **Assumptions**

It is assumed that the solo school librarian is providing the same basic quality library programming and services as specified by the district's Librarian Appraisal Instrument. The librarian's three designated roles include teacher, campus leader, and program administrator. In addition, I assumed the campus principal and staff are supportive of the library program and along with the librarian, encourage the use of the library's facilities and resources. Another assumption is the solo librarian has admission to a plethora of formats and resources for social capital activities. The last assumption is all procedures for selection of participants, data collection, and data analysis were well defined within the high ethical standards as stipulated by the district, Sam Houston State University, and the Institutional Review Board.

## **Summary**

Chapter I began with the explanation of the problem, purpose, and significance of the study. The problem is the literature on teacher social capital overlooks the school librarian. If teacher social capital focused on teaching strategies and instructional practices can enhance student learning and achievement (Leana, 2010), then purposeful communication between school librarians, who in Texas must also be a teacher, should also enhance student learning. The topic of school librarian social capital is confounded when the librarian is a solo librarian because he or she is understaffed (Busch, 2011).

Next, Chapter 1 continued with the inclusion of the study's research questions and theoretical framework. Social capital framework provides understanding of how teachers' relationships affect their professionalism and how relationships might relate to student achievement. Specifically, Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests through collaboration with others and coaching, colleagues learn from one another (Social Learning Theory [Bandura], 2012). Definitions of key terms needed for understanding were then included followed by delimitations, limitations, and assumptions. Last, the organization of the study was described.

## **Organization of the Study**

The study will be conducted to investigate the social capital experiences of solo middle school librarians in a large urban public school district in south Texas. The background of the study is included in Chapter I. Moreover, the surfeit of research (e.g. Penuel, et al., 2009; Pil & Leana, 2009; Plagens, 2010; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011) that exists in investigating teacher social capital in K-12 public schools. Teacher social capital and its effect on student efficacy continue to be extensively investigated (Pil &

Leana, 2009). Because state-certified public school librarians in Texas must also be teachers and are instructional staff on campus, the goal is to identify social capital activities in which solo librarians participate.

Chapter II provides a review of literature relevant to the study. A plethora of related topics discuss the role of the public school librarian as a teacher and leader. Then, social capital and social capital activities in context are explained. Next, library staffing, attributes of a strong library program, and the special challenges facing the solo librarian are discussed.

In Chapter III the method used in my study is explained. Subsections include: (a) the purpose of the study, (b) the research questions, (c) design overview, (d) participants, (e) instrumentation, (f) procedures, (g) and data collection and analysis. A summary concludes the chapter.

Chapter IV includes a discussion of the results of each participant in the study. Emerging themes are identified and explained including: (a) collegiality, (b) professional organizations, (c) principal support, (d) librarians are teachers, and (e) isolation. A summary concludes the chapter. Chapter V completes the discussion of the study. Implications and recommendations are included. I address the study's connection to the literature and theoretical framework. In addition, I provide implications for practice and policy. Last, recommendations for future research and school leaders and a conclusion complete the chapter.



## CHAPTER II

### Review of the Literature

A review of research related to the topic was conducted. To locate relevant literature, I first entered the search terms *social capital and school library\** and *solo library\** into Sam Houston State University library's integration of Google Scholar. The search term *social capital and school library\** yielded 25,900 results and the search term *solo library\** returned over 39,700 results. Searches were repeated by replacing *solo library\** with *one-person-library* because those two terms are frequently used interchangeably. The number of times each of the resulting articles had been cited and a review of the brief abstracts listed in the Google search results page was used as a guide to select relevant articles. Articles that had full-text links were saved and reviewed.

To narrow the number of results and identify scholarly works the terms mentioned above were then entered into the Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, JSTOR, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text databases. An appraisal of the citations from seminal articles guided the collection of additional articles. Studies were identified by the scope of the research. Additionally, articles were gathered to focus on the importance of teacher isolation before gathering information about the history, definitions, and focus of social capital.

Chapter II will provide explanation of broad topics regarding teacher isolation, school librarians as teachers, middle school library staffing in Texas, solo librarians, social capital theory, and the theoretical frameworks used in this study. Teacher isolation is historically addressed. Social capital theory in relation to (a) teachers, (b) trust, (c) human capital, (d) effects on students, (e) innovation, and (f) the role of the principal is

also investigated.

### **Isolation**

Teacher isolation is a serious issue in schools (Chandler, 1983; Chenoweth, 2009; Costello, 1987; Davis, 1987; Dussault, et al., 1999; Elmore, 2000; Flinders, 1988; Goodlad & Klein, 1974; Levine, 1986; Lieberman & Miller, 1992, 1984; Little, 1990; Rosenholtz & Smylie, 1984; Rothberg, 1986; Zielinski & Hoy, 1983) and separation is encouraged (Rothberg, 1986; Su, 1990). Cox and Wood in 1980 discovered teachers were “alienated” (Rothberg, 1986, p. 320) within their school (Hadar & Brody, 2010). Teachers work alone in the enclosed classroom with little occasion to confer with colleagues about best teaching practices (Davis, 1987; Flinders, 1988; Hadar & Brody, 2010; Lieberman & Miller, 1992, 1984; Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Rogers & Babinski, 2002; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Thompson & Hamilton, 1991). Teachers are “being alone” (Daly & Silver, 2008, p. 541) or as Sarason stated in 1966, “teaching is a lonely profession” (Sarason, Levine, Goldenberg, Cherlin, & Bennett, 1966, p. 74). One teacher said “I feel like I’ve been thrown into deep water without a life preserver” due to the isolation of schools and “no one ever asks me if I need help. No one ever comes into my classroom. I had no idea teaching could be such a lonely job” (Fulton, Burns, & Goldenberg, 2005).

Sarason further connected isolation to “the absence of shared practical knowledge” (Sarason, 1982, pp. 132-133). Overall, the greater the teacher isolation, the lower the teaching aptitude and implementation (Rosenholtz & Smylie, 1984). In 1975 Lortie noted, teaching has been characterized as taking place in isolation with the

formative decades of our school system formatted around teacher separation. Goodlad and Klein (1974) concur.

Historically, schools and districts have established organizational structures which limit interaction between teachers (Bidwell, 1965; Keedy & Robbins, 1993; Rosenholtz & Smylie, 1984). Ultimately, isolation causes teachers to become “burned out” (Davis, 1987, p. 72). Presently, collaboration is deemed a solution to reduce professional isolation (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005).

Teachers in colonial times were dispersed all over the populated territories and isolated for long periods of time. Self-sufficient isolated adults represented “cells.” School patterns changed as population increased in various areas and separate cells converged in one building, organized by student age; however, teacher task interdependence did not increase. One-room schools, however, remained, and the multi-unit school did not impact teachers’ work (Lortie, 1975, 2002). The physical isolation prevailed because “geographic barriers and extreme localism in school affairs inhibited the creation of bonds among those who worked in schools” (Lortie, 1975, p. 20). Decentralization was the school organization norm (Dornbusch, Glasgow, & Lin, 1996).

The 1800s produced a great expansion of schools with a fixed ratio between and teachers and students; growth meant and still means more teachers. Teaching had high turnover in the nineteenth century and due to demand, schools required many new teachers. Administrators could add new classrooms and new teachers even as they lost experienced teachers (Lortie, 1975, 2002). As Lortie (1975) states, “Such flexibility was possible as long as teachers worked independently...but had their tasks been closely interwoven, the comings and goings of staff members would have created administrative

problems” (p. 16). Teacher interdependence was minimized by the lack of interaction with colleagues. Even after schools employed married women and the average time of service increased, low task interdependence prevailed (Lortie, 1975, 2002).

Lortie (1975) argues that the cellular or “egg crate school” (p. 14) began to be challenged in the 1950s. However, through the 1970s schools were organized around teacher separation. Teachers were expected to instruct students over specific knowledge and skills without help from others. Teaching was behind closed doors, making it impossible for collegial evaluation to occur (Dornbusch & Scott, 1975). This format “has played a key role in the development of the American public school” (Lortie, 1975, p. 15). This teacher separation and low task interdependence affected the demographics of those persons drawn to the profession (Lortie, 1975, 2002). Organizational conditions within schools also affected the ability to attract academically talented individuals to the profession (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990).

In 1932, Waller’s *Sociology of Teaching* highlighted a foundational study of schools and teaching. Waller was a teacher practitioner and his experiences informed his studies (Cohen, 1989). Providing “the first comprehensive sociological analysis of the school” (Bidwell, 1989, p. 39) Waller also first viewed schools as social organizations (Willower & Boyd, 1989). Widely cited in other prominent works such as Lortie’s (1975) *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*, Eisner’s (1979) *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, Lightfoot’s (1983) *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture*, and Bogdan and Biklen’s (1992) *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and*

*Methods* (Testa, 1998). Waller's observations are still relevant today when investigating the impact of teaching on adults (Pajak, 2012).

A central question to Waller's 1932 study was: What does teaching do to teachers? (Waller, 1932). Hansot (1989) argued that Waller's 1932 depiction of teachers is timeless and universal. Waller believed that one could only learn to teach by the act of teaching and this occupation impacted all forms of social life (Waller, 1932). During the 1930s community members schemed to keep teachers isolated from other adults to limit their romantic activities and expressions (Pajak, 2012). Teachers are considered outsiders with placed-upon "humbling restrictions" (Waller, 1932, p. 49). Therefore, "the teacher is psychologically isolated from the community because he must live within the teacher stereotype" (Waller, 1932, p. 49). The teacher stereotype is a barrier between the teacher and all of society. As Waller (1932) stated, "the teacher can never know what others are really like because they are not like that when the teacher is watching them. The community can never know what the teacher is really like because the community does not offer the teacher opportunities for normal social intercourse" (p. 49). As a result, teachers never get to truly know themselves (Pajak, 2012).

Ironically, during the 1930s a teacher's enforced isolation was also of the utmost interest to the public. Members of the community would "spy upon him from curtained windows and quiz the children for news of his doings" (Waller, 1932, pp. 62-63). A teacher's expression of sexuality was tremendously cautioned against and the community took careful steps to prevent its expression. Male married teachers were preferred, and single male teachers were discouraged from dating. Most restricted were women, who in some communities were required to sign a statement such as: "I promise not to go out

with any young men...” and “I promise not to fall in love, to become engaged or secretly married” (Waller, 1932, p. 43). As a result, the teacher is isolated from society. The energy a teacher must spend on maintaining poise and inhibiting feelings and emotions restricts his normal communication with others; sexuality was traded for service (Pajak, 2012).

Social distance and sterile conversation enforced a vast collective chasm between teachers and students which, according to Waller (1932), was to discourage spontaneous human interaction and deter emotional entanglements. The teacher, alone in the community and divided from students, would seek out colleagues, basically strangers. Teachers conducted their lives in accordance with the expectations of the school (Rosenholtz, 1991).

Alienation from others and self-permeated the 1930s teacher. Because of a teacher’s constant need to keep students’ attention while maintaining authority, along with a drive for perfection, the teacher’s temperament, demeanor, and facial expression were hardened. Control, rather than true feelings, led to the teacher’s loss of spontaneity. Teachers also became alienated from students, self, and even other adults due to mechanical routines such as emotionless gestures and the daily rhythms of routine. Furthermore, the teacher sacrificed part of adulthood in the necessity for understanding student culture to be successful in the classroom. Further isolation from others was created due to the teacher’s becoming less friendly due to the demands of teaching and loss of the essential self (Waller, 1932).

Waller (1932) did not believe that all was lost for teachers and their struggles with isolation. He did, however, have recommendations for improvement. In short, the role

of the teacher would have to change as would teachers themselves (Pajak, 2012). First, the social restrictions on teachers should be removed; teachers should fight for their right to act as adults and embrace an adult lifestyle without the scrutiny of the community. This would benefit current teachers and those of future generations. Waller (1932) envisioned teachers rejecting the social norms limiting their lives and inhibiting their personalities. Waller (1932) stated

Certainly teachers must be free outside the school. Teachers must be received as normal and in no way exceptional members of the community; they must neither gain nor lose status by being teachers...If teachers...invariably met the statement "That's no way for a teacher to act" with a cacophonous jeer, then the social position of the profession might be changed in a very few years. (pp. 455-456)

Waller (1932) also proposed hiring married and mature teachers to impact the social context of teaching. As a result of these recommendations being carried out, enforced social isolation would lessen. Waller (1932) also recommended lessening teacher isolation with psychological support.

Related to the findings of Waller (1932), today teacher identity does not belong to the teacher (Pinar, 2004). Students, parents, administrators, politicians, corporate CEOs, and policymakers dictate and influence teacher identities by their expectations and preconceptions (Bikmaz & Guler, 2002; MacLure, 1993; Pinar, 2004; Woods & Jeffrey, 2002). Because politicians blame teachers for society's ills, teachers take on even more scrutiny as cogs in the institutional formalism wheel (Goldstein, 2014; Pinar, 2004). Pinar (2004) recommended for teachers to overcome the "self conceived by others" (p. 22) through a reflective practice.

Several other researchers (Bentzen, 1974; Bentzen, Williams, & Heckman, 1980; Flinders, 1988; Goodlad, 1975; Ross, 1958; Tye & Tye, 1984; Waller, 1932) indicated teacher isolation is an issue. In the mid-1950s, Columbia University's diffusion studies resulted in a suggestion that innovation in schools occurred with more extroverted teachers (Ross, 1958; Tye & Tye, 1984). Posited in those studies conducted in the 1960s and 1970s was the idea that teachers must be able to share information with each other for improvement to occur (Bentzen, 1974; Goodlad, 1975; Tye & Tye, 1984). Furthermore, in the late 1960s, groups of schools in Los Angeles, California formed by the Research Division of the Institute for Development of Educational Activities conducted a successful experiment (Goodlad, Sirotnik, & Overman, 1979).

The League of Cooperating Schools formed an informal network of 18 school staffs to collaborate on strategies to improve instructional programs. The primary opportunity to do so was through teacher sharing. This early success coupled with the findings of *A Study of Schooling* in the 1980's laid the foundation for discovering ways for teachers to collaborate on best practices (Bentzen, 1974; Goodlad, 1975; Lieberman & Miller, 1992, 1984; Tye & Tye, 1984). As Tye and Tye (1984) stated, "recognizing the existence of and intervening in the pattern of social interaction is one obvious strategy" (p. 321).

In the 1970s, Dan Lortie's seminal work *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* was published and continues to be cited in studies related to the working environments and conditions of teachers (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005). Lortie is credited with first identifying the concept of teacher isolation (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005). Lortie believed teacher isolation is the norm in many schools resulting in a loss of valuable



knowledge (Lortie, 1975, 2002; Marshall, Pritchard, & Gunderson, 2004). According to Lortie (1975, 2002) teacher isolation begins with the teacher's college education.

Teacher preparation programs lack connecting recurrent dilemmas to available knowledge or cited situations for study. This intellectual isolation requires the student teacher to rely upon individual recollections, encouraging student teachers to come to believe teaching is an individualistic, not collegial, enterprise (Lortie, 1975, p. 70).

Furthermore, a student teacher's practicum is usually with only one professional teacher, limiting the scope of experiences and exposure to students, and reinforcing the ideals of traditionalism and individualism. Isolation forces the new teacher to attempt to rectify issues independently before reaching out for assistance (Rosenholtz, 1985). Even when teachers do finally converse, however, it is difficult for the beginning teacher to understand and relate to practical knowledge as he or she struggles with perceiving and interpreting what is significant (Lortie, 1975, 2002; Rosenholtz, 1985).

Lortie (1975, 2002) discovered regardless of gender and relationship status, isolation is perceived negatively by teachers. Teachers are likely to turn to other teachers for support (Lortie, 1975, 2002; Rothberg, 1986). According to Lortie (1975), "relying upon other teachers to prevent loneliness intensifies the role of teaching in one's life; cultural isolation follows personal isolation" (p. 98).

Lortie "refers to restricted opportunities for feedback in accounting for the lack of a technical knowledge base in teaching" (Flinders, 1988, p. 19). Isolation is, Lortie (1975, 2002) argued, a product of historical institutional characteristics such as cellular architecture and high teacher turnover. Lortie (1975, 2002) argued that from an organizational perspective, teachers working independently provide greater flexibility of

the organization to replace them; high teacher interdependence would thwart school management.

Seminal research by Goodlad in 1983 known as *A Study of Schooling* (Bentzen, Williams, & Heckman, 1980; Goodlad, 1983a, 2004; Goodlad, Sirotnik, & Overman, 1979; Tye & Tye, 1984) indicated that teacher separation is the norm and encouragement for teachers to collaborate on curriculum and instruction strategies is lacking (Rothberg, 1986). Goodlad based his research on the perspective teachers may hold of what constitutes isolation (Goodlad et al., 1979). For schools to improve staff members must be able to share new knowledge with each other (Tye & Tye, 1984). *A Study of Schooling* discovered that of the 1,350 elementary and secondary teachers who participated (Goodlad, 1983a), 75% stated their greatest influence for the content taught was decided by their own interests, experiences, and backgrounds (Goodlad, 2004; Tye & Tye, 1984). Only one half of the teachers relied upon district-level personnel or outside consultants (Goodlad, 2004). If teachers rallied together to discuss best practices via college courses, in-service workshops, or professional organization meetings, they did so infrequently and these activities were not popular (Goodlad, 2004). In addition, teachers were ethnocentric in their world view, transcending the physical and social environment (Goodlad, 2004). Last, very few teachers visit colleague's classrooms to observe best practices and supervisors do not support the exercise. Despite the separation, all teachers responded they perceived the best way to collaborate "would be through informal gatherings" (Rothberg, 1986, p. 320).

Flinders in 1988 concurred with previous researchers in resolving that teacher isolation is an important concern (Costello, 1987; Goodlad, 2004; Rothberg, 1986). He

argued that previous research describes isolation as commonplace and is a barrier to innovation (Goodlad, 2004). Previous strategies to reduce isolation have failed, albeit a problem for beginner and experienced teachers in all types and levels of schools (Flinders, 1988).

Flinders (1988) posited isolation as an explanation of “the minimal-to-nonexistent influence of research-based information on teacher decision making” (p. 19). Flinders also noted that isolation may be viewed differently teacher to teacher. What is isolation for one equates to autonomy and support to another (Flinders, 1988). Flinders’ qualitative case study on teacher isolation followed 6 high school teachers and their management of daily teaching activities. The researcher observed little to no express contact with school administrators and only minimal contact with other teachers (Flinders, 1988). Flinders deduced isolation “as a shared condition under which teachers carry out daily classroom instruction” (Flinders, 1988, p. 22). Agreeing with Lortie (1975) regarding the physical cellular nature of schools physically dividing teachers and also teachers describing their tasks as separate from colleagues, teachers seem to accept isolation as part of the job description (Flinders, 1988). The educators observed purposely chose to use their classroom in which to escape collegial collaboration and maintain that reality (Flinders, 1988). Why would teachers impose isolation upon themselves? Flinders (1988) posits the weight of the interpersonal strains teachers are burdened under coupled with the practical demands of the teaching profession cause self-imposed isolation. School teaching has the feeling of no definitive ending to tasks, unlike most professions, with demands surpassing resources (Lortie, 1975).

Teachers set high professional standards for themselves and their actions may be driven by their need to complete administrative tasks. Collegial interactions may thus be seen as not only a distraction but also a threat (Flinders, 1988). Lack of time is the culprit. Flinders' (1988) study produced responses from teachers regarding collegial interaction as a true hindrance to complete instructional tasks. One teacher said in response to the idea of collaborating with administrators, "What they do best is just stay out of my way" (Flinders, 1988, p. 24). In fact, teachers organized their activities to prevent collegial interaction to protect their time. This adaptation strategy may be referred to as a "practicality ethic" (Flinders, 1988, p. 25) in teaching, motivated by the professional goal of instructional quality. As a result, isolation as a means to protect professional excellence undermines "the very instructional quality that this work strategy is intended to protect" (Flinders, 1988, p. 26).

In 1999 Dussault, Deaudelin, Royer, and Loiselle published their discoveries studying the relationship between professional isolation and stress in 1,110 teachers in Quebec, Canada. These randomly selected teachers from a sample of 2,924 elementary, secondary, and vocational French schools were given the UCLA Loneliness Scale and Teacher Stress Inventory; a positive and significant correlation between isolation and stress was found (Dussault, et al., 1999). These results suggest isolation is a prominent part of a teacher's job (Dussault, et al., 1999).

Documented studies of teachers' isolation exist (Aiken, 2001; Dussault et al., 1999; Forsyth & Hoy, 1978; Smith & Scott, 1990; Zielenski & Hoy, 1983). Especially in the elementary school, teacher feelings of isolation and alienation exist (Zielenski & Hoy,

1983; Akin, 2001). Akin (2001) reported on a study in which a teacher beaten by feelings of isolation and alienation and the lack of collaborative opportunities said,

Learning as a process is an idea that is painfully neglected in my own growth as a teacher. This idea of process gets ignored in the teacher-proof curricula we are asked to use. In order to survive we must often pretend we know exactly what we are doing. And when asked to make improvements, we are simply expected to incorporate new techniques. I'm brought to my knees again and again under the weight of the purposeful, non-acknowledgement of my own status as a learner.

This is a burdens under which I feel voiceless, unable to even think straight. (p. 10)

Isolated conditions render teachers to learn new skills through trial and error (Rosenholtz & Smylie, 1984; Smith & Scott, 1990). Conversely, Odden and Archibald (2009), Barber and Mourshed (2009), and Hattie (2009) all discovered collaboration between teachers increased student achievement. Working with colleagues is especially important with teachers because their learning is procedural, meaning feedback on performance and altering implementation is needed for improvement (Johnson & Johnson, 1987).

In 2011, DuFour posited nothing has changed since Goodlad's 1983 study of schooling. Teachers continue to toil in isolation, have limited access to colleagues, and many times prefer to labor alone (DuFour, 2011; Little, 1990). DuFour claimed embedding professional collaboration as part of professional routine as the only way isolation will lessen (DuFour, 2011). He stated "the structure and culture of the organizations in which they work haven't supported, required, or even expected them to collaborate" (DuFour, 2011, p. 58). Teachers have been left to do as they wish, and DuFour believes this contradicts professionalism. In short, "professional doesn't mean

autonomous” (DuFour, 2011, p. 58) because collaboration with colleagues in most professions is considered a best practice. Professional organizations such as the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future all recognize collaboration as a mandatory professional activity (DuFour, 2011). However, collaboration must focus on curriculum, assessment and performance evidence, improving professional practice, and supporting struggling students (DuFour, 2011).

Few organizational supports exist for teachers upon which they may develop social capital (Awang, Ismail, & Kareem, 2013). Rosenholtz (1991) identified social organizational conditions that influence faculty collaboration (Collinson, Cook, & Conley, 2006). When a teacher believes he or she is inept in educational technology applications or instructional practices, they are less likely to seek out collegial advice (Rosenholtz & Smylie, 1984). When faced with a lack of routine or the teacher feels their students’ work is unpredictable, teachers believe requests for assistance would negatively reflect upon their teaching performance (Collinson et al., 2006; Rosenholtz & Smylie, 1984). Teachers also believe they have a lack of time in their busy work schedules to facilitate social capital (Collinson & Cook, 2004; Collinson & Cook, 2001). These conditions may keep the teacher from self-disclosure and seeking out assistance (Collinson & Cook, 2004; Rosenholtz, 1991).

Teacher sharing professional ideas with each other is necessary (Rothberg, 1986) yet teachers continue to work alone (Davis, 1987). Public schools do not intrinsically support a collegial structure (Davis, 1987). Rothberg (1986) argues that teacher isolation exists and is a problem in education today, despite “successful schools, where student

achievement is greatest, do not isolate teachers, but rather encourage collaborative planning and collegial relationships” (Johnston, Markle, & Arhar, 1988, p. 28). In 1987 Johnson and Johnson concurred “cooperation with others is especially important for teachers because much of what they need to learn is procedural...it relies heavily on receiving feedback about performance and modifying one’s implementation until errors are eliminated” (Johnson & Johnson, 1987, p. 27). In 1993, McLaughlin noted teacher isolation negatively impacts teaching quality. If left unchecked, isolation may cause teacher attrition (Davis, 1987).

Reduction of isolation is, however, achievable. Face-to-face resources are key (Fulton, Burns, & Goldenberg, 2005) and supervisors and administrators must support these initiatives for success (Davis, 1987; Lieberman & Miller, 1992, 1984). Solutions include but are not limited to (a) building trust, (b) shared decision making, and (c) training and staff development in human relations activities (Rothberg, 1986). Davis (1987) recommended teacher supervisors who also teach classes, such as a department chairperson, to allow teachers to observe them teaching. This activity will build trust and collegiality between supervisors and teachers.

Once trust is developed, supervisors may encourage similar relationships between teachers that help reduce isolation (Davis, 1987). Rothberg also recommended (a) creation of quality circles, (b) task forces or committees to address issues, (c) teachers and staff sharing *what is it I do* at staff meetings, (d) required peer observation, (e) increased social dealings among teachers and staff; (f) attendance at professional meetings; (g) retreats; and (h) informal staff gatherings to discuss professional reading and/or teaching skills (Rothberg, 1986).

Other recommendations have appeared over the decades. Davis (1987) encouraged teacher observation without and between departments, support groups, cluster groups, team teaching, and joint decision-making on professional matters. Hadar and Brody (2010) disclosed another solution is to put teachers together in groups to break isolation (Gaikwad & Brantley, 1992). By providing opportunities for acquaintance, discussion of shared topics of interest or discipline, and a safe environment for which this can occur, isolation can be overcome (Dussault, et al, 1999.; Hadar & Brody, 2010; Keedy & Robbins, 1993). As stated by Couros (2015), “Sometimes, the most valuable thing you get from the network isn’t an idea but the inspiration or courage to try something new” (p.54.)

In the 21st century, teacher isolation continues. The majority of teachers continue professional activities alone, as discovered in a study by Scholastic and the Gates Foundation (2013). Research data findings include only 3% of a teacher’s day is spent collaborating with colleagues (Scholastic & the Gates Foundation, 2013). Furthermore, in countries other than the US, such as Finland and Japan, where students outperform our students on international tests, teacher collaboration is a critical component of teaching.

American teachers do believe collaboration is important. A study by Scholastic and the Gates Foundation reported that to help teachers remain in the profession, 90% of US teachers believe time for professional collaboration is critical (Mirel & Golfin, 2012). Fifty-one percent of all respondents in the study expressed lack of time for collaboration with colleagues as one of the most significant challenges they face professionally (Scholastic & the Gates Foundation, 2013).



By reducing or even eradicating teacher isolation, schools can improve (Rothberg, 1986). Because no one can learn in vacuity, teachers are professionally limited in their capacity for excellence (Hadar & Brody, 2010). Instead, “new information and ideas emanate not only from individual learning, but also from interaction with others...collaboration creates a culture in which further learning is stimulated and supported” (Hadar & Brody, 2010, p. 1642). Teachers teaming with other teachers is a critical step toward isolation plummeting (Barron & Bergen, 1992; Dussault, et al., 1999) and student improvement increasing (Costello, 1987). Decreased isolation promotes knowledge sharing and exposure to new instructional practices which may promote teacher reflection on their effectiveness (Little, 1982; Smylie, 1988) which may benefit teacher learning (Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009) and student achievement (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007).

In this phenomenological dissertation proposal, the solo middle school librarians asked to participate are also teachers. Like their colleagues teaching in the classroom, “...the separation and isolation of content and learning how to learn not only has isolated teacher librarians but made them invisible in school culture” (Loertscher, 2012, p. 57). As far back as 1960, Gaver commented on the isolation of the school librarian (Gaver, 1960). Therefore, school librarian isolation is not new to education.

### **School Librarians Are Teachers**

The evolution of school libraries influences the role of the school librarian as teacher. School libraries are a relatively new concept in the United States. During the 18th century, classroom libraries held resources for student use. However, by the 19th century school libraries began to be created. In 1838 New York state allocated funds

specifically to create school libraries (Greenman, 1913). During the second half of the 19th century students and teachers received library services through a variety of means, many of which are continued today: (a) the public library provided books to students and teachers; (b) the public library and school library shared materials and rotated resources; (c) the public library existed within the school; or (d) students and teachers went without library materials and resources (Harris, 1995; Wofford, 1940).

These methods for library services could not support the instructional needs and interests of students and teachers like that of a dedicated, centralized library of resources and materials on the school campus managed by a qualified individual (Woffard, 1940). By 1915 school libraries were considered critical to advancing a school's goals (Harris, 1995; Woffard, 1940). The cost for establishing a school library, however, was cost prohibitive for most school districts (National Education Association, American Library Association, & Certain, 1925). The federal government had not yet begun its role in funding schools, but that changed in 1917 with the Smith-Hughes Act. By increasing funding to education, secondary schools began to transform, and the school library as an institution began its expansion (Rudy, 2003). The number of school libraries doubled in growth from 5,290 to 11,734 between 1895 and 1912 (Greenman, 1913).

Approximately 65% of students in the United States received some type of school library services by 1945 (American Library Association, Douglas, & American Association of School Librarians, 1945). Secondary schools continued to improve, but elementary schools continued to exist without school library services. Previous methods of providing elementary students with information and reading materials continued via

classroom libraries, the public library, or not at all (American Library Association, Douglas, & American Association of School Librarians, 1945).

By 1953, 95% of secondary schools received some form of library services, although of those only 36% received services from a centralized school library (United States Board of Education, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2005b). On the other hand, only 25% of elementary schools received some form of library services. How their information needs and reading materials were provided remains unclear (American Association of School Librarians, & American Library Association, 1960).

Public education in the late 1950s proved to be in crisis mode. Due to the 1957 Sputnik launch and its impact on the Cold War, education became a matter of national security (Rudy, 2003). The National Defense Education Act passed in 1958 did not specifically assist school libraries, but did provide for the purchase of print and audiovisual (AV) materials wherever needed in the schools (United States Board of Education, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2005a).

By the early 1960s the number of schools increased, but the number of school libraries did not (USDOE, & NCES, 2005b). With acceptance of the *Standards* in 1960, it became evident that a demonstration of what strong school library programs looked like was needed (Boardman, 1994; Sullivan, 1963). In 1962 the American Association of School Librarians received a five-year, \$1,130,00 grant from the Knapp Foundation, Inc., to study five elementary and three secondary school library programs and their pivotal role in quality education (Sullivan, 1963). The grant also highlighted the value of school libraries in the instructional program. As a result, evidence submerged that highlighted the value of a centralized school library with multisensory materials (Boardman, 1994).

The Project's impact could be seen through the hundreds of school libraries developed and expanded and the increase demand for credentialed and qualified librarians and support staff (Boardman, 1994).

Furthermore, in 1965 U. S. president and former teacher Lyndon Johnson was able to secure federal funding of school library resources through Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (USDOE, & NCES, 2005a). As a result, by 1978 the number of schools with dedicated libraries increased to 85% with an average number of 12 books per student. This trend continued through 1990 (USDOE, & NCES, 2005b).

The 1990s and 2000s brought more change in school libraries. The number of schools with a library and schools with a librarian began to drop. In 1993-1994, 96% of schools had a school library and 83% of schools had a school librarian. Soon those percentages dropped to only 92% of schools having a school library in 1999-2000 (USDOE, & NCES, 2005b). A small increase occurred in 2003-2004 and was followed by a decline in 2007-2008 to 90% of schools having a school library and only 62% having a school librarian (USDOE, & NCES, 2009).

During the 1920s, the American Library Association (ALA) and the National Education Association (NEA) created *Standard Library Organization and Equipment for Secondary Schools of Different Sizes* (NEA, Certain, North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, & ALA, 1920) and *Elementary School Library Standards* (NEA et al., 1925). These were the first standards created to describe what secondary school libraries and elementary school libraries should look like and the services the school librarian should provide. They were passed in 1920 and 1925

respectively. For the first time, the types of work the librarian was to perform included (a) administrative, (b) technical, and (c) instructional.

Administrative and technical tasks included the obvious daily activities specific to a library such as (a) collection development, (b) circulations management, (c) cataloging, and (d) book repair. The third type of work performed by a school librarian, the instructional role, explicitly stated in the standards that school librarians were to be of equal status as a teacher in compensation and importance on the campus. Therefore, since the beginning of library standards, the instructional role of librarian as teacher at both secondary levels and the elementary level was that librarians teach students how to search, access, and use library materials and to foster a lifelong love of reading. The elementary standards provided specific content to be taught at each grade level, and the secondary standards provided general recommended instructional content (NEA et al., 1925).

The *Standard Library Organization and Equipment for Secondary Schools of Different Sizes* and *Elementary School Library Standards* may have also established the idea that school librarians and teachers should collaborate on instruction. These standards dictated that school librarians and teachers meet with teachers to discuss instructional policy (NEA, Certain, North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, & ALA, 1920; NEA et al., 1925). In addition, both levels of school librarian were to encourage students to become public library users (NEA, Certain, North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, & ALA, 1920; NEA et al., 1925).

After the Great Depression and World War II, the idea of increasing spending for education was not popular (Rudy, 2003). Despite this lack of interest, in 1945 new

professional standards for the school librarian were published, *School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow: Functions and Standards*, again for elementary and secondary levels (ALA, Douglas, & AASL, 1945). While the 1945 standards remained basically the same for the administrative and technical role of school librarians, the expectations for the instructional role deepened. For example, not only were school librarians to foster a love for reading in students, but school librarians were to also hold deep knowledge of what books were in their collection and each student's reading abilities. In addition, school librarians were to "provide an opportunity through library experiences for boys and girls to develop helpful interest, to make satisfactory personal adjustments, and to acquire desirable social attitudes" (ALA, Douglas, & AASL, 1945, p. 10). Also, school librarians were expected to "cooperate with other teachers" (ALA, Douglas, & AASL, 1945, p. 12) implying that they, too, are teachers.

The standards covered kindergarten through Grade 12 and specified the role of school librarians in the context of learning, calling for certification of school librarians (Kester & Jones, 2004). The standards indicated that school librarians were to provide expertise in curriculum development by serving on committees and provide materials through the library that supported the curriculum. School librarians were to provide bibliographies for a variety of reading levels and interests, and provide assistance with remedial programs. They continued to teach students how to access and use various reference materials (ALA, Douglas, & AASL, 1945).

During the development of library standards, Francis Henne, a passionate leader in school library advocacy supported the instructional role. She even believed that school

librarians should retain certification as a school librarian and a teacher. Her advocacy impacted future library standards (Kester & Jones, 2004).

In 1960, new standards were published, *Standards for School Library Programs* (AASL & ALA, 1960; Kester & Jones, 2004). Most of the descriptions of the roles of the librarian remained unchanged, but added were serving parents and the community, and more instructional activities. Specific activities for instruction, including but not limited to book talks, storytelling, and reading aloud, were mentioned (Craver, 1986). Also included were the expectations of managing a student assistant program (AASL & ALA, 1960). The idea of students being communicators of information, not only receivers of information, was shared. The 1960 professional standards also stated that audiovisual (AV) equipment was the jurisdiction of school libraries (AASL & ALA, 1960).

A report by the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare published in 1963, *The School Library as Materials Center*, dictated that school librarians should teach all aspects of the curriculum with their teacher colleagues (Craver, 1986). In support of such direction, in 1965 federal funding through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) positively impacted services and resources provided. This began a period of school libraries being able to support the curricular and instructional needs of students and teachers (Kester & Jones, 2004).

Only nine years after the previous professional standards were published, *Standards for School Library Programs* (AASL & ALA, 1960) became *Standards for School Media Programs* (AASL & Department of Audiovisual Instruction of the NEA, 1969). The result of the increase of audiovisual resources and media into school libraries, the school library was renamed the media center. As a result the instructional role of the

librarian as teacher expanded to activities such as (a) assisting students, teachers, and technicians in the design and production of media, (b) encouraging and supporting student development of listening, viewing, and reading skills; (c) visiting classrooms as an instructional resource per teacher request; and (d) providing teachers with information about professional development opportunities (AASL & Department of Audiovisual Instruction of the NEA, 1969; Kester & Jones, 2004). In addition, as school librarians collaborated with students selecting materials, school librarians were expected to teach students how to evaluate the resources (Kester & Jones, 2004). The roles of administrative tasks and technical tasks were briefly mentioned in comparison to instructional tasks of the school librarian (Kester & Jones, 2004).

The 1960s and 1970s were a time of tremendous change in society and culture in the United States. This included educational change under the direction of President Ford (Rudy, 2003), and as a result, new school librarian professional standards were published in 1975, *Media Programs: District and School* (AASL & AECT, 1975). The school librarian's instructional role as teacher evolved due to a greater emphasis on student communication of ideas through the creation of media and the application of information. The school library program was to become an integral part of the larger campus instructional program, and school librarians were to measure the effectiveness of their programming and instruction. School librarians were to deepen and expand their role as a teacher by facilitating course development, instructional design, and the "creation of alternative modes of learning" (AASL & AECT, 1975, p. 13). In 1979, according to Craver (1986), the school media specialist was referred to as a teacher in professional literature.



In 1983, the government published *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. The report sounded the alarm regarding America's inferior education programs and their lacking to provide the level of education needed for students to ultimately be successful and competitive in a global environment. As a result, the report called for extreme educational reforms. More important to school libraries, although the report did not mention libraries directly, *A Nation at Risk* called for information literacy instruction, acknowledging the emerging technology and information age and the need to provide students with the necessary skills to manage information (Levitov, 2004). As a result, librarians began to assume a focus on their instructional role while grappling with how to integrate emerging technologies and information literacy instruction into the library program (Craver, 1986).

In response to *A Nation at Risk*, The Sandia National Laboratories published a controversial report entitled "Perspectives on Education in America" that contradicted *A Nation at Risk* (Carson, Huelskamp, & Woodall, 1993; Stedman, 1994). The Sandia Report contended that *A Nation at Risk* was misleading in its depiction of declining SAT scores, NAEP scores, and international assessment comparisons (Stedman, 1994). However, the Sandia Report did agree that poor and urban schools needed better support and resources for more successful schools (Carson, Huelskamp, & Woodall, 1993; Stedman, 1994).

Computers and information technology appeared in schools in the 1980s. Once again, such a tremendous change in education sparked the publication for new school library professional standards. *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (AASL & AECT, 1988) was published in 1988. The roles of the school

librarian had evolved into that of (a) information specialist, (b) teacher, and (c) instructional consultant.

The three roles added complexity and depth to the role of school librarian. Information specialist replaced the label of administrative yet broadened its idea of what constituted a resource; school librarians were still providing adequate materials and guiding students and teachers to appropriate resources. The teacher role was greatly expanded to not only the content of the curriculum, but also teaching information literacy skills and how to use and communicate the information discovered. Content also now included copyright, privacy, constitutional rights, critical thinking, encouraging lifelong learning, and ensuring students understood the new role of the school librarian (AASL & AECT, 1988). Providing professional development courses to staff grew to also providing training to parents about how to enhance student reading, viewing and listening skills. Last, the instructional consultant role added the component of school librarians developing assessment development, in addition to the development of instructional activities (AASL & AECT, 1988).

The 1998 revised publication of *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* and its updated professional standards were a result of computers and technology becoming a norm in schools, providing access to information in real time from all over the world. Instruction was the tome's focus with indicators and subject area connections for instructional standards; the role of teacher came to the forefront. The new roles of the school librarian included (a) teacher, (b) instructional partner, (c) information specialist, and (d) program administrator.

The most recent professional standards publication is *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (AASL, 2009). The four roles of the school librarian remain the same. However, the student learning standards were modified and are discussed in detail in *Standards for the 21st Century Learner* (AASL, 2007) and in *Standards for the 21st Century Learner in Action* (AASL, 2009b). These standards are currently under revision.

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). In the federal law, school libraries are included in what great schools should encompass. However, school libraries are not a line item in the bill nor are there dedicated funds, so school library professional organizations such as the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) are advocating for opportunities to address the issues (Miller, 2016). Sheketoff, executive president of the American Library Association Washington Office, stated, “Now this process moves to the state and local governments . . . librarians need to be talking to the people who run the school districts” (Miller, 2016, January, p.6). Sketetoff went on to say, “We are no longer the sideshow or the entertainment. We are [one] of the key elements” (Miller, 2016, p. 8).

Another provision of ESSA is the Supporting Effective School Library Programs Act, “an authorization for developing and enhancing effective school library programs, including professional development and support for up-to-date materials” (Vercelletto, 2016, p. 10). School libraries in the USA have faced huge budget cuts in the past, resulting in understaffed, understocked, or closed libraries. With AASL’s definition of an effective school library program for ESSA implementation, implementation on the

state and local level can begin implementation. AASL defines the term as, “An effective school library program has a certified school librarian at the helm, provides personalized learning environments, and offers equitable access to resources to ensure a well-rounded education for every student” (Habley, 2016, p. 1). In addition, AASL wrote the U.S. Department of Education (USED) in response to a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on ESSA accountability and state plans. The recommendations, cosigned by the American Library Association Washington Office, focus on school librarian participation in state plan development and on the school librarian’s role in teaching digital literacy skills (Habley, 2016).

In Texas, school librarians must hold the School Librarian Certificate (Texas Secretary of State, 2009). Rule §239.40 of the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) enables the holder to practice as a Prekindergarten-Grade 12 librarian. In its introduction, the General Provisions of the law reads as follows,

Because the school librarian plays a critical role in campus effectiveness and student achievement, the rules adopted by the State Board for Educator Certification. . . ensure that each candidate for the School Librarian Certificate is of the highest caliber and possesses the knowledge and skills necessary to improve the performance of the diverse student population of this state. . . An individual serving as a school librarian is expected to actively participate in professional development activities to continually update his or her knowledge and skills. Currency in best practices and research as related to both campus leadership and student learning is essential. (Texas Secretary of State, 2009)

In addition, the certificate holder must have successfully completed a Texas-approved school librarian preparation program, successfully complete the Texas school librarian examination, hold at least a master's degree from an accredited college or university, and have at least 2 years of creditable years of teaching experience as a classroom teacher (Texas Secretary of State, 2009). Texas defines creditable years of teaching experience in 19 TAC §153.1021, in the position of teacher or higher, from entities that are (a) Texas public elementary and secondary schools, including charter schools, (b) state regional education service centers, (c) state departments of education, (d) Texas Department of Corrections—Windham schools, (e) public elementary and secondary schools in all other states of the United States or any of its territorial possessions, (f) overseas school operated by the U.S. government, (g) Texas public or private colleges or universities, (h) Texas private elementary and secondary schools, (i) non-public special education contract schools, (j) Texas Department of State Health Services state hospitals and state schools, (k) Texas veteran's vocational school, (l) public or private colleges and universities and private elementary and secondary school in all other states in the United States or within its territorial possessions, (m) foreign public or private elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities, (n) United States Department of the Interior--Bureau of Indian Affairs, (o) United States service academies, (p) United States military service, (q) Job Corps, or (r) Peace Corps (Texas Education Agency, 2015). Currently the minimum full-time equivalent for one-half year is 90 service days (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

### Middle School Library Staffing

Historically, middle school libraries in a large suburban school district in south Texas have been staffed with one full-time certified librarian. Student enrollment for each middle school is between 560 and 1,500 students; no variation exists in library staffing regarding the variance in student enrollment. Based on the Texas library standards, the staffing provided the school libraries with an Acceptable rating. See Table 1 for Texas library standards regarding professional staffing.

Table 1

#### *Campus Level Professional Staff to Support Student Achievement*

| Enrollment  | Standard for Number of Certified Librarian(s) |   |            |       |
|-------------|---|---|------------|-------|
|             | Exemplary                                     | Recognized                                      | Acceptable | Below |
| 0-500       | 1.5   | 1   | 1          | >1    |
| 501-1,000   | 2   | 1.5   | 1          | >1    |
| 1,001-2,000 | 3   | 2   | 1          | >1    |
| 2,000+      | 3 + 1 additional<br>for every 700<br>students | 2 + 1 additional<br>for every 1,000<br>students | 2          | >2    |

*Note.* The professional staffing levels listed are for campuses that support one level. Special consideration must be given to additional staffing to serve students if a library supports more than one level. Enrollment is calculated using the campus Average Daily Attendance (ADA). Adapted from Texas State Library and Archives Commission. (2005). *School library programs: Standards and guidelines for Texas*.

In addition, historically middle school libraries in a large suburban school district in south Texas have been staffed with one full-time library assistant. In the fall, 2011, that staffing was reduced through the elimination of the library assistant position.

Student enrollment for each middle school is between 560 and 1,500 students; no variation exists in library staffing regarding the variance in student enrollment. With current staffing, school libraries are at a Below Standard rating. See Table 2 for Texas library standards for staffing.

Table 2

*Campus Level Paraprofessional Staff to Support Student Achievement*

| Enrollment  | Standard for Number of Library Paraprofessional(s)      |   |            |       |
|-------------|---|---|------------|-------|
|             | Exemplary   | Recognized  | Acceptable | Below |
| 0-500       | 1.5   | 1   | .5         | >.5   |
| 501-1,000   | 2   | 1.5   | 1          | >1    |
| 1,001-2,000 | 3   | 2   | 1.5        | >1.5  |
| 2,001+      | 3 + 1 additional<br>librarian for every<br>700 students | 2 + 1 additional<br>librarian for every<br>1,000 students | 2          | >2    |

*Note.* The paraprofessional staffing levels listed are for campuses that support one level. Special consideration must be given to additional staffing to serve students if a library supports more than one level. Enrollment is calculated using the campus Average Daily Attendance (ADA). Adapted from Texas State Library and Archives Commission. (2005). *School library programs: Standards and guidelines for Texas*.

### **Strong Library Attributes**

Quality public schools are drivers of performance and their effectiveness affects our culture and economics. An equitable education for all students requires a large fiscal investment from taxpayers. Over the years, higher performance standards, beginning with *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education) in 1983, have caused government officials, parents, and the business community to demand increased student achievement (Pil & Leana, 2009). The emphasis on school-level performance on standardized assessments encourages educators to agree student academic achievement is

“a collective effort across the school rather than as a solo endeavor by individual teachers within the school” (Leana & Pil, 2006, p. 355). Each year schools across the nation strive to surpass the previous year’s student academic performance by educating an innovative and competitive workforce (Manafy & Gautschi, 2011).

Educational practitioners and researchers have increasingly focused on school improvement and any school conditions that may increase student achievement and benefit instructional practices. Strong libraries with adequate staff support student achievement (Achterman, 2008). Researchers in multiple state-level studies have discovered that test scores tend to be higher for schools that have a full-time, certified school librarian, and even higher for schools with such a librarian with support staff (Achterman, 2008).

The American Library Association (ALA), and its division of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) state that any school library program success, regardless of how well designed the program is, “depends ultimately on the quality and number of the personnel responsible for the program” (American Association of School Librarians, 2010). With at least one certified school librarian working full-time in the school’s library, support staff is necessary at all grade levels. Each school library should have at least one full-time clerk for each school librarian (American Association of School Librarians, 2010).

Texas established its *School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines for Texas* in 2001; the standards and guidelines were updated in 2005 and are currently being updated again. Standard II of the *School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines for Texas* (2005) addressed school library staffing and rates different professional and



paraprofessional levels as seen in Table 1 and Table 2. With the elimination of the library assistant, the librarian and the campus library program is most impacted by fewer visits to the library by individual students, fewer information literacy skills instruction contacts, fewer books and materials checked out, and reduced administration of electronic reading programs (Smith, 2001). Strategies to deal with decreased clerical assistance must be addressed.

### **Solo School Librarians and Their Work**

The solo school librarian makes a long-lasting impression on administrators because principals have no consistent information provided that may counter impressions made as students, teachers, or aspiring administrators (Hartzell, 2002). Each individual solo librarian's work is therefore extremely important to the overall profession. A solo school librarian works alone in the library that may serve hundreds of students and staff or multiple thousands of students and staff. No paid clerks, aides, paraprofessionals, or second librarians exist. For some solo school librarians, they once worked with other paid staff, but are now alone. Or, perhaps the solo school librarian has always worked alone. They deliver services that "empower others to be successful...and their contributions get swallowed up in the activities of these people" (Hartzell, 2002, p. 95). This may result in a type of occupational invisibility (Hartzell, 2002). Being the only library staff member on campus limits the scheduling of the solo librarian, bringing about isolation and invisibility (Hartzell, 2002).

Regardless, school librarianship is challenging work, and the solo school librarian must "learn to prioritize, to work smart, to strategically use their time and resources, and to take time for themselves, both personally and professionally" (Church & Reeve, 2011,

p. 7). In addition, the solo school librarian may have to let go of things that may have always been, delegate or share responsibility, and focus on students first (Church & Reeve, 2011).

Solo school librarians have many duties that include but are not limited to (a) budgeting, (b) collection management, (c) lesson planning, (d) book fairs and fundraising, (e) professional development (participating in and providing), (f) volunteer recruiting, (g) technology resources, (h) research classes, and (i) reading promotions (Cherry, 2011; Karabush & Pleviak, 2011). To ensure the mandatory library areas are served, the solo school librarian must conserve resources, energy, and time by identifying high-impact tasks that provide the most value and best supports the school's mission (Karabush & Pleviak, 2011). Lofrumento (2004) suggested the solo school librarian must always first address the tasks that directly affect student learning. To get the work done, Lofrumento (2004) also recommended the solo school librarian (a) keeps one's desk clean, (b) handles paper only once, (c) handles email only once, (d) doesn't procrastinate, (e) limits attendance to meetings, (f) shortens meetings, and (g) makes lists.

### **Solo School Librarians and Local Resources**

Despite the lack of clerical or professional support in the solo school librarian's campus library, many local resources may be available to assist the solo school librarian in his or her work. First, the solo school librarian may join campus committees such as the school improvement committee and department chair meetings to build instructional alliances. In addition, the professional development campus committee is an ideal arena to promote the solo school librarian's potential offerings and expertise to teachers, and is the perfect scenario for library advocacy (Karabush & Pleviak, 2011). Second, a means

to the end of receiving support for the solo school librarian is for the solo school librarian to become indispensable to the campus through leadership in understanding curriculum development and implementation of new technology innovations (Karabush & Pleviak, 2011). If the solo school librarian earns linchpin status, the importance of the library to administrators, who may then become more open to requests for additional staffing may be solidified. Third, if a solo school librarian is from a larger urban area, the school district may provide district-level support, such as in Mesquite ISD in Mesquite, Texas. The district provides support for (a) acquisitions, cataloging, and processing; (b) technology assistance; (c) programming; (d) personnel; and (e) time management (Woodard, 2011). Support allows the solo school librarian to concentrate on instructional and student-centered tasks. Some school districts, like the Elko County School District in Nevada, which covers 17,100 square miles, collaborate and provide staff development monthly either face-to-face, online via the district's interactive video equipment, or using Elluminate Live! (Blackboard Collaborate). For Elko County School District, collaboration and sharing make the solo librarian feel less isolated, and improve the school library program through librarians sharing ideas with colleagues (Nickel, 2011). Last, the solo school librarian may join local or regional library professional organizations.

Perhaps the most crucial support system a solo school librarian may need is the connection to resources in day-to-day work. Karabush and Pleviak (2011) recommend that every solo school librarian has "someone who can 'talk you off the ledge'" (p. 51) when he or she is overwhelmed. Face-to-face meetings provide the best support. In addition, local school librarian groups provide opportunities for collaboration and

comradery with others who understand what the solo school librarian is going through. The researchers also recommend that the solo school librarian joins educator groups, too (Karabush & Pleviak, 2011).

### **Solo School Librarians and Non-Local Resources**

The solo school librarian must not forget that he or she is also a great resource and can greatly benefit and grow professionally by attending and even presenting to peers at local and statewide conferences (Karabush & Pleviak, 2011). The cost of attending conferences can be, however, inhibiting. If attending conferences is not possible, the resources available to the solo school librarian include local, state, national, and international networking resources.

Although face-to-face interaction is preferred (Baber & Waymon, 2010) web sites provide instant and constant access to professional organizations and research. Email and listservs such as LM\_NET are open to school librarians worldwide. In addition, state professional organizations provide listservs to facilitate communication (Church, 2011). The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), provides members a “community filled with people that will completely understand your role” (Harvey II, 2011, p. 5). Not only does the AASL provide members with a database of lesson plans based on the AASL library standards, but also provides planning resources for goal setting to create a 21st century school library. Other Web 2.0 resources abound, from Facebook groups to following library experts on Twitter. Online learning communities exist as well (Church, 2011).

## **Theoretical Framework**

Prominent experts Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Lin (2001) explained social capital as representing the relationships between actors and their connections to resources secured through relationships (Healey, 2011). Specifically, Bandura's Social Learning Theory is used to illuminate collaboration with others and coaching through activities such as observation, colleagues learn from one another. Other activities for learning may include demonstration and replication (Bandura, 2012). In schools, teacher social capital "promotes instructional innovation, the diffusion of effective teaching practices, and facilitates school reform efforts (Healey, 2011, p. 4). When prominent in a school, teacher social capital can influence how teachers teach to improve instruction, and therefore increase student learning (Healey, 2011).

In schools, social capital may be described as the collegial interactions between educators (Leana, 2010). More specifically, teacher social capital may be circumscribed as a social network where teachers collaborate with each other, share resources, and support each other in providing learning opportunities that benefit all stakeholders (Minckler, 2011). Social capital resides in the relationships between teachers as they look to other teachers for information and advice instead of experts or their principal (Leana, 2011). Social capital activities that create social capital experiences may include: (a) engaging in reflective discussions about teaching and learning; (b) observing a colleague's instruction; (c) sharing expertise; collaboration on instruction; (d) planning for instruction with colleagues; and (e) sharing a focus with colleagues on instruction and student learning (Healey, 2011).

The economical aspect of education includes human capital, which is established by changes people make that bring skills and capabilities to their work, causing people to behave in new ways (Blaug, 1970; Coleman, 1988). The creation of social capital is benefited by family and community social capital (Coleman, 1988). Education has been the focus for analysis of human capital (Sweetland, 1996) as education improves people's economic standing (Becker, 1964, 1993; Johnson, 1960; Schultz, 1961, 1971). The importance of human capital theory can be observed in its formal publications record, and its five Nobel prizes awarded since 1971 to scholars studying human capital theory (Becker, 1993; Wright, 1992). The leading scholars of human capital theory were Theodore W. Schultz and Gary S. Becker (Sweetland, 1996). Other leaders in the field included Milton Friedman and Simon Kuznets' work published in 1945, and Robert M. Solow's work in 1957 (Sweetland, 1996).

### **Social Capital Theory**

The three most influential thinkers of social capital were Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam. The World Bank also used social capital as an organizing idea stating it is what holds organizations together (The World Bank, 2014). The formal idea of social capital began, however, in the 19th century.

French aristocrat de Tocqueville (1835, 1840) wrote about the life and institutions of early America in *Democracy in Action*. Regardless of socio-economic status, age, or personality, he observed that people were forming relationships and these associations were important to building a civilized nation. John Dewey (1915) referred to "social capital" in 1899's *The School and Society*, but did not define the term. Almost a decade later Granovetter (1973) based his ideas on de Tocqueville's and identified social capital

relationships as interpersonal ties in social networks (Daly & Silver, 2008). Granovetter (1973) explained these strong and weak ties in social capital as “a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie” (p. 1361). Granovetter (1973) stated that trust in relationships was important regardless of the strength of friendships or size of the social network (Daly & Silver, 2008).

Bourdieu (1985) also based his ideas on social capital on de Tocqueville’s work (Daly & Silver, 2008). Bourdieu (1985) described social capital as not only ties to a network, but as all of the resources in a network. Participants in the network benefited from and created power and advantage from participating in, and having access to, the network’s economic, social, and institutional resources (Daly & Silver, 2008). By participating in and benefiting from the institutional relationships within the network, people strengthened the network through their own contributions (Daly & Silver, 2008). As the term “social capital” became more commonly used during the late 1990s, Lin (1999) explained social capital as an “investment in social relations with expected returns” (p. 30). Because people contribute time and resources to relationships, and do so assuming to benefit from the give and take, social capital required relationships (Portes, 1998).

Coleman (1988) explained that social capital existed in even non-elite relationships and came to fruition from “changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action” (p. S100). Coleman identified three forms of social capital: (a) obligations and expectations, (b) information conduits, and (c) social norms (Coleman, 1988). A critical attribute for obligation and expectations was trust (Daly & Silver,

2008). The expectation for repayment existed (Coleman, 1988) and each participant would benefit from the endeavor (Daly & Silver, 2008; Lin, 1999). Information channels provided communication that yielded action (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999). Societal norms attributed to achievement (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999). In addition, social capital entailed a broad variance of entities that were defined by function. However, Coleman (1988) noted that one aspect of social capital does not necessarily benefit all actions.

Putnam (2000) in his tome *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* pulled ideas regarding social capital from de Tocqueville and Coleman (Daly & Silver, 2008). For Putnam (2000), mutually supportive connections or associations in relationships enhanced the power of those participating in social capital via increased access to information and skill sets. Participants could positively improve their career goals and objectives instead of working to improve their organization (Daly & Silver, 2008). Networks and resources were not focused upon; rather, relationships and connections among individuals were most important and reciprocal. This observation allowed Putnam (2000) to identify bonding social capital versus bridging social capital. Bonding social capital was relationships within the group (exclusive) and bridging social capital (inclusive) was relationships outside of the group (Daly & Silver, 2008). For successful social relationships to foster, both aspects were critical (Putnam, 2000). This allowed citizens to resolve conflicts, foster trust, connect to each other, and supported the achievement of goals (Putnam, 2000). Therefore, social capital is manifested by “connectedness, trust, and exchanges” with the expectation of a return (Daly & Silver, 2008, p. 543.)



More recently, the spotlight on social capital has been on social cooperation (Gilead, 2009). Group resources exemplify the interconnectedness of relationships (Oh, Chung, & Labianca, 2004; Oh, Labianca, & Chung, 2006). Skocpol (2003) remarked on the decline of US associational life and the new management of civic organization by privileged Americans. Bookman (2004) focused on new forms of social capital developing among families, especially regarding the needs of women. “Hybrid” associations, such as the non-profit organization, have developed into important collective action (Sampson, et al., 2005). Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) recognized inequality affects the important social capital component of trust. Last, Baber and Waymon (2010) emphasize face-to-face networking is essential to productivity and information integration.

**Librarian and teacher social capital.** The review of literature produced insight on how teacher social capital (a) requires trust, (b) is most effective paired with human capital, (c) effects students in other areas besides student achievement on assessments, (d) inspires innovation in instruction, and (e) needs principal leadership to grow. In addition, my statements from the literature suggested the solo librarian often lacks the resources for exemplary social capital; whatever social capital is acquired, however, is greatly appreciated by the librarian. The same themes were later found to infiltrate the data collected from the middle school solo librarian focus group when discussing their social capital activities within the school district, and outside of the school district.

**Social capital and trust.** Several researchers (Penuel, et al., 2009; Pil & Leana, 2009; Plagens, 2010; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011) have identified trust as an important component of teacher social capital and trust assisted teachers in becoming

better instructors; therefore, teacher trust increased student achievement. Penuel, Riel, Krause, and Frank (2009) suggested that social capital, including trust, provided teacher access to the resources that effect change. Plagens (2010) expanded on the idea that individuals socially connected to others, forming a trusting network or group membership as a resource, were better able to achieve their goals. Van Maele and Van Houtte (2011) explained that previous research results concluded an important component of an effective school was strong social capital, and trust specifically affected a school's performance. Building trust is a multifaceted process. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2012) concluded that schools could not exist without trust, and trust could only be developed through intimate, professional experiences. Pil and Leana (2009) discovered that when teachers trusted each other, they showed their vulnerability to weaknesses and would seek assistance from other teachers and their principal. Van Maele and Van Houtte (2011) affirmed that trust was the foundation of social capital and teachers seek trust from their (a) students, (b) parents, (c) colleagues, and (d) principal. In addition, the authors stated that three aspects affected trust relations: surface level; value-oriented standards and norms; and basic underlying assumptions (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). The authors also proposed that a school staff's homogeneity related to trust, and that similar work values built trust.

**Social capital and human capital.** Researcher Leana (2010) explained that social capital and human capital, which means teacher knowledge, skills, and credentials, worked together to assist with student academic achievement. Leana (2010) argued that to improve an entire school instead of only individual teachers, both social and human capital must exist. She explained that the ideal situation of social and human capital

working together created a trusting climate, which was even more important than human capital. In reference to one study, Leana (2010) researched all public schools in a district and found that social capital was extremely powerful. In a second study of over 200 elementary schools she discovered “human capital and social capital are inextricably intertwined” (Leana, 2010, p. 19). Pil and Leana (2009) detailed how social capital and human capital work together to increase student achievement. Pil and Leana (2009) further stated that teacher social capital had been ignored by policy makers because of “growing evidence . . . that teacher collaboration and trust may have as great an effect on student achievement as teacher human capital” (Pil & Leana, 2009, p.1101). The authors studied 1,013 public elementary school math teachers in a northeast U.S. large urban school district. Pil and Leana (2009) found that first, regarding human capital theory, teacher formal education did provide student performance gains. Second, regarding social capital, students performed better when strong horizontal relations existed on the group level, but vertical strength only affected the individual level. However, student academic achievement existed when teachers had strong relationships with school administrators, but the same could not be said for the team level. Third, Pil and Leana (2009) learned that a teacher’s most useful professional advice came from one’s grade-level team. Last, high-ability teachers in groups with strong ties elicited higher performance from students. The authors recommended social capital should not be underestimated and policy makers should consider requiring the fostering of social capital on campuses.

**Effects of social capital on students.** Teacher social capital affects students in other ways besides grades on a report card. For example, Plagens (2010) reviewed

studies on social capital in the educational arena and the Chicago Public Schools in 2001 via public opinion surveys of teachers and principals. Research linked an increase in attendance, a decrease in the dropout rate, and an increase in achievement with social capital (Plagens, 2010). The author shared that “social capital affects achievement because it helps overcome dilemmas of collective action and encourages altruism and social solidarity” (Plagens, 2010, p. 19). The author recommended that these findings would be interesting to public officials and citizens who seek to improve schools so that teacher social capital may be promoted. Plagens (2010) also stated that social capital might be a predictor of dropout rates. He cautioned, however, that the racial and economic representation in the sample schools were imbalanced compared to the rest of the country.

**Social capital and innovation.** Schools often turn to innovative ideas to enhance student learning. Couros (2015) defines innovation as “a way of thinking that creates something new and better” (p.19). The innovative implementation of new math curriculum was altered by teacher social capital. Coburn and Russell (2006) presented a paper at the annual conference of the American Sociological Association that expressed their conclusions to researching the determinants of teacher social capital networks during the implementation of new innovative mathematics curriculum. The two urban school districts studied included high-poverty neighborhoods and a large number of recent immigrants. The authors reviewed data from eight elementary schools during the first year of a 3-year National Science Foundation-funded study on reform strategy, human and social capital, and implementation of an innovative mathematics curriculum. Using questioning, observations, and interviews, the authors discovered that the informal

structures of teacher interaction were more beneficial than the formal ones (Coburn & Russell, 2006). In addition, the new curriculum did not influence the social networks but the campus strategy did. Organizational decisions such as room assignments and scheduled planning times provided ease of access to teacher interactions, and teachers reached out to other teachers they perceived to be alike to structurally rather than teachers they perceived to be content experts. The authors further cautioned that their findings were limited because they did not apply interview protocol with all stakeholders or quantitative social network approaches (Coburn & Russell, 2006).

Another research topic was the application of new and innovative technology and the presence of teacher social capital. Frank, Zhao, and Borman (2004) decided to learn more about implementing innovative practices in schools, and specifically how social capital and diffusion of computer technology innovations in public schools were affected. The authors defined computer innovations as “the Internet, educational software, and the digital camera” (Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004, p. 149). To learn more, the authors studied six schools in the northern Midwest and Southwest of the U.S. serving students K-12 and ranging in socioeconomic status and wide variations of ethnicity. The researchers surveyed, observed, and interviewed 230 teachers and principals between March and May 2000 and again between March and May 2001 (Frank et al., 2004). They discovered quality social capital exchanges depended on the quality of the resources, and that social capital manifested when teachers exchanged expertise through informal means. In addition, social pressure to use the new technology existed. Therefore, social capital was found to be an important force in successful implementation of new computer

technology. Suggested future research included investigation of social capital on a multilevel framework and research on a larger or smaller scale (Frank et al., 2004).

**Social capital and the principal's role.** Principals and other school leaders play an integral role in building and sustaining teacher social capital. Leana (2010) stated that because social capital affected teacher ability and motivation, she recommended that to increase teacher ability, school leaders should give teachers more time to study improving teaching strategies. Other recommendations by Leana (2010) included the importance of group-level incentives becoming the norm because

Fundamental to social capital is a shared feeling among teachers that each of them is going to do more than they have to do because each knows they can count on others . . . They have a shared destiny and a shared purpose. (p. 22)

When two California elementary schools' leadership wished to improve literacy instruction and support teacher collegial interactions by implementing new literacy curriculum, Penuel et al. (2009) studied social capital associated with changing instruction and the principal's leadership. The authors suggested that social capital provided teacher access to the resources that effect change. Penuel et al. (2009) suggested for change to be successful, teachers' interactions must be focused on discussing improving instruction. In fact, teachers benefited from purposeful time to discuss instruction. The success of teacher interaction and student achievement in literacy of the two schools, despite similar resources, was vastly different. One principal alienated her staff by relying on outside experts to design teaching strategies, and the other principal relied on her staff to design teaching strategies (Penuel et al., 2009). The researcher (Penuel et al., 2009) cautioned that further studies needed to include classroom

observations. Other researchers discovered similar results regarding the role of the principal in supporting and nurturing teachers' social capital. Coburn and Russell (2006) established school leaders played an integral function in supporting teachers' social networks beyond the campus. Likewise, in regards to supporting teachers' social networks, Penuel et al. (2009) recommended principals who wish to facilitate teacher collaboration should value teacher expertise and knowledge, and foster higher teacher social capital. On the campus, Frank, Zhao, and Borman (2004) suggested that principals provide professional development time to teachers, support ambivalent teachers to learn more and share with others, and encourage interaction between departments. Principals should also create a culture that explicitly defines the school's purpose (Dornbusch, Glasgow, & Lin, 1996). When implementing innovation on the campus, Frank et al. (2004) cautioned that principals must be cognizant of social capital as a fixed resource, they must be aware of other innovations that could affect social capital resources, and realize that one effectively implemented innovation at one school may not hold the same result in another.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methods**

#### **Purpose of the Study**

As a result of a pilot study (Lilly Hughes, 2013), I investigated a sample of solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district as they shared their participation and experiences with librarian-to-librarian social capital. Social capital may be circumscribed as a social network where stakeholders collaborate with each other, share resources, and support each other in providing learning opportunities that benefit all stakeholders (Minckler, 2011). First, the social capital activities in which solo middle school librarians and other librarians participated were identified. Second, the social capital activities in which solo middle school librarians participated with other solo librarians within their school district were identified. Third, the factors that influenced the solo middle school librarian's ability to participate in social capital activities were examined. Last, the social capital activities solo middle school librarians believed to increase their job performance and student learning were examined.

#### **Research Questions**

Focusing on solo middle school librarians in a large suburban school district in south Texas, the three research questions addressed in this qualitative study were as follows:

1. How do solo middle school librarians perceive social capital experiences with other solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district?



2. How do solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district perceive social capital experiences with other school librarians outside of their large Texas school district?

3. How do solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district perceive factors that influence social capital experiences?

### **Overview of Design**

A qualitative phenomenological study was used to investigate the psychological and philosophical attributes of individuals (Creswell, 2013). Perceptions and meanings of a common phenomenon, participants' lived experience, were explored to find the commonalities and generalities within (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Words and actions of lived experiences were explored (Moustakas, 1994; Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, & Poole, 2004) to understand their wholeness (Moustakas, 1994).

Edward Husserl, a German philosopher and mathematician, founded phenomenology in the early 20th century, establishing his ideas on Descartes' view of removing assumptions from philosophy (Buckingham et al., 2011; Moustakas, 1994). Soon after, the works of philosophers Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty continued Husserl's work to ultimately found the crux of existentialism (Buckingham et al., 2011). As stated by Creswell (2013), phenomenological assumptions are based on the common grounds of "... the study of the lived experiences of persons, the view that these experiences are conscious . . . , and the development of descriptions of the essences of these experiences . . ." (p.77).

Moustakas (1994) based his transcendental phenomenological research method on Husserl's work. Moustakas' research method differs from other qualitative research

methods (i.e. ethnography, hermeneutics, and empirical phenomenology) in approach to the study, data gathering methodology, and data analysis methodology. A systematic approach was applied to put aside the researcher's preconceived ideas about the phenomenon being researched (called the *Epoche*) so that the researcher listened with an open and receptive mind (Moustakas, 1994). Intuition and imagination during data collection focused on perceptions and feelings with all statements first treated as equally important (Moustakas, 1994).

Creswell (2013) described a phenomenological study as investigating “the common meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 76) to find its “universal essence” (p. 76). The researcher investigated the individuals experiencing the phenomenon, and created an amalgamated account of “what” and “how” they encountered the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Popular in the study of education (Creswell, 2013) and based on the writings of Tesch (1988) and van Manen (1990), the philosophical assumptions had a common foundation: the conscious experiences were described (van Manen, 1990) and the essences were described, not analyzed (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) suggested phenomenological investigations have four processes: (a) the *Epoche*, (b) phenomenological reduction, (c) imaginative variation, and (d) synthesis. Husserl called the first process, the *Epoche*, “the freedom from suppositions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85) and an experience itself for the ever present and receptive researcher who perceived and experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The second process, phenomenological reduction, provided the researcher the opportunity to focus on the qualities of the experience. The approach was “elucidating one's knowledge”

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 91) to find meaning in everything in the phenomenon leading back to the researcher's experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Steps included: (1) bracketing [sic], where the research focus was placed in brackets; (2) horizontalizing to create Horizons, which were "the invariant constituents of the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97); (3) clustering the horizons into themes, and (4) organizing the horizons and themes into a coherent textural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The third process of imaginative variation was using the imagination to describe the essential structures of a phenomenon toward meanings. The last process was the synthesis of meanings and essences of the phenomenon as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). These processes provided a methodology from which we understood the meaning of the phenomenon via human experiences, perceptions, and feelings.

Creswell (2013) based his studies on phenomenology on Moustakas (1994) for a psychological perspective and van Manen (1990) for human science. Features included

- an emphasis on a *phenomenon* to be explored;
- the exploration of this phenomenon with a *group of individuals* who have all experienced the phenomenon;
- a *philosophical discussion* about the basic ideas involved in conducting a phenomenology;
- the researcher *brackets*...herself out of the study by discussing personal experiences with the phenomenon;
- a *data collection* procedure that involves typically interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon;

- *data analysis* that can follow systematic procedures that move from the narrow units of analysis to broader units...and on to detailed descriptions that summarize ... “what” the individuals have experiences and “how” they experienced it; and
- [it] ends with a descriptive passage that discusses the *essence* of the experience...The “essence” is the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study. (Creswell, 2013 pp. 78-79).

Today the solo middle school librarian’s participation in social capital activities has very little literature addressing the phenomenon. The opportunity for the solo middle school librarian to participate in social capital activities influences job performance and student learning, and should be of interest to education leaders.

### **Sampling and Participants**

As per Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), qualitative studies do not, like quantitative studies, apply statistical generalizations to the population. As a result, instead of random sampling, qualitative studies use a sampling scheme (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Participants must know something about a shared topic to illustrate their experiences (Marshall, 1996) and describe their observations of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). As a result, qualitative studies require a non-random (probabilistic sampling) scheme (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

External and internal generalizability influence qualitative and quantitative research (Maxwell, 1992). In quantitative research, external generalizability is used where findings are applied to a population. In qualitative research, however, internal generalizability is applied and as a result, sample selection becomes even more important.

Therefore, purposeful methods for selecting participants must be in place (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005).

For a phenomenological study, several participant selection strategies must be implemented. As per Creswell (2013) and Johnson and Christensen (2010), the researcher must (a) establish a sampling strategy, (b) identify the appropriate number of people to interview, (c) look at the research questions for guidance on whom to choose to interview, (d) and decide upon the approach of selecting participants. Phenomenological research guides all aspects of selection (Creswell, 2013; Marshall, 1996).

Purposeful sampling, most commonly used in phenomenological research of information-rich studies (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013), was utilized. The experiences of participants were not generalized to the population (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Because the solo middle school librarians shared their experiences as participants in solo capital activities, purposeful sampling was suitable.

Using the purposeful sampling technique, I selected the solo middle school librarians. I first limited the 14 current solo middle school librarians group to those who had at least three consecutive school years' experience as a solo middle school librarian in the school district. I gleaned this information from the school district's library director. From those who met the criteria, I contacted their principal via encrypted electronic mail to invite each librarian to participate in this phenomenological study. From those principals who agreed I could approach each librarian, I contacted the librarian via encrypted electronic mail to invite each to participate in this phenomenological study. With those who agreed to participate, I scheduled a time for the interview within a three-week window. From those who could meet this time constraint I

met with five solo middle school librarians privately for individual interviews. I chose participants with the most overall years of experience as a school librarian in the school district. I implemented this technique because this characteristic provided me with increased insight to the phenomenon (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

Determining the adequate number of participants was debatable (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2010). The number of appropriate participants to interview in a phenomenological study has yet to be agreed upon, and recommended numbers vary. Creswell (2013) suggests between five and 25 participants, but Marshall (1996) recommends a more flexible suggestion of interviewing participants until data saturation occurs. No new data emerging defines data saturation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). The number of participants I chose for the individual interviews fit within the ranges recommended by researchers (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2010; Morgan, 1997). Each participant was provided a pseudonym to protect their anonymity.

### **Instrumentation**

Of the several characteristics of phenomenological research, the researcher is a key instrument to examine, observe, and interview sources and then interpret data sources, collection, and analysis; I am the main instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). My role as researcher is disclosed in this section. In addition, specific instruments and data collection processes are explained.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Influenced by Descartes, Husserl's principle of *Epoche* in the phenomenology philosophy is to set aside one's preconceived notions or postulations so that clear

understanding of the phenomenon may come to fruition (Dowling, 2007; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). Researchers in phenomenological studies put aside their biases to create a new perspective to the phenomena (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) uses Husserl's term of *Epoche* when referring to *bracketing* (Creswell, 2013; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; van Manen, 1990; Wall et al., 2004; Williams & Morrow, 2009). Bracketing is putting the research focused upon in brackets; all other data are put aside (Moustakas, 1994).

I hold certifications in Texas for secondary language arts teacher, school librarian, and school principal, and have 27 years of experience as a Texas educator. My first encounter with middle school librarians began in 1994, when I first became an elementary school librarian in a large, suburban school district in southeast Texas. Observing them at all-level librarians' meetings, they seemed to keep to themselves and not be as vocal as the elementary school and high school groups of school librarians. When I became a high school librarian three years later, my exposure to them remained the same, and they continued to keep to themselves. Only when I was promoted to district-level library coordinator five years later did I begin to experience their personalities and professionalism. During this time middle school librarians became solo middle school librarians. Again, I only saw a fraction of whom they were, and felt that they were the library program's weakest link.

I was finally exposed to their true selves when I went back to the campus nine years after being library coordinator, as a solo middle school librarian. Between the fall of 2011 and fall 2012 I was a complete member of the middle school solo librarians; however, mid-fall of 2012 I left the group due to a leadership promotion in a different large suburban district in south Texas. For the 16 months I was a solo middle school

librarian, getting to know the library programming, collegial spirit, kindness, and creativity first-hand elevated my professional and personal opinion of each of them. As a result, my interest in the solo middle school librarian continued to my new leadership position in a large suburban district in south Texas.

I am also an introvert. I am uncomfortable in social settings and gain energy by participating in quiet, solo activities. I am not necessarily someone who talks much except on topics on which I am passionate. Over 100 years ago, Carl Jung identified the psychological types of introvert and extrovert, but did proclaim that no one is purely one or the other (Cain, 2013). *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* narrowly defines introversion as “the state of or tendency toward being wholly or predominantly concerned with and interested in one’s own mental life” (2012, p. 657). Today’s experts, however, disagree with this definition. Laney (2002) explained,

Introversion...is a healthy capacity to tune into your inner world. It is a constructive and creative quality...found in many independent thinkers whose contributions have enriched the world. Introverts have social skills, they like people, and they enjoy some types of socializing. (p. 43)

Introverts simply recharge by taking part in quiet activities in solitude (Cain, 2013). In the past, I have worried that my introversion negatively impacted my participation in social capital, and I have negatively associated introversion with being quiet. However, Cain (2013) says, “We perceive talkers as smarter than quiet types—even though grade-point averages and SAT and intelligence test scores reveal this perception to be inaccurate” (p. 51). So as an introvert, of which I am in company with 50% of the world’s population (Baber & Waymon, 2010), I do, as an introvert, bring



positive contributions to the social capital arena. Ironically, because of participation in social capital being challenging for me, I am more interested in the phenomenon. Today, more professionals expound upon the significance of social capital (Baber & Waymon, 2010).

My relationship with the school district was bracketed to focus on librarian lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). I used bracketing (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010), or the *Epoche* (Moustakas, 1994), to ignore personal assumptions and feelings about the study's participants and the school district. To reduce bias, I focused upon what the librarians said in response to questions compared to my personal reactions through reflexivity, or self-reflection (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Wall et al., 2004; Williams & Morrow, 2009). Informal member checking, which required me to ask librarians in the study for feedback on the accuracy of my findings, assisted in ensuring precise data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009) as I minimized my personal thoughts.

## **Procedures**

Working with my doctoral chair and committee, I sought their approval to conduct the research. After chair and committee approval, I sought permission from the large suburban south Texas school district to conduct research. The school district granted approval for my research. After the school district granted approval I submitted the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application to Sam Houston State University (SHSU). The IRB at SHSU granted approval. After both school district and IRB at SHSU approval I contacted the school district's library director, campus principals, and pool of participants via encrypted electronic mail to begin data gathering activities. After

I received affirmative responses, each participant received an encrypted electronic folder that included the following items: (a) a consent form; (b) a demographic survey; and (c) the interview questions for preparation of the interview. Each item was styled as an encrypted Google form so that participants could respond to the inquiries or create personal notes electronically. Google forms allowed for expedited data collection.

Individual interviews were scheduled with five solo middle school librarians. After I identified each item in the folder with the participants, they were asked to sign the consent form when I interviewed them face-to-face, and electronically completed the encrypted electronic demographic survey. The survey included questions about age, gender, race, level of experience, and formal education levels. Participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions about social capital opportunities within the school district, outside of the school district, their perceived level of support from school administrators, and their perceived attitudes to how social capital impacts their professional goals. Encrypted audio recordings as well as researcher notes were saved from the interview, and subsequently, responses were transcribed.

For effective research, Creswell (2013) recommended researchers use two of eight strategies in qualitative research: prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review or debriefing; negative case analysis; clarifying researcher bias; member checking; rich, thick description; and external audits. Of these, Creswell (2013) stated the most reasonable to apply are triangulation, writing detailed descriptions, and member checking. I employed clarifying researcher bias, and member checking.

I have clarified my bias as researcher. I have highlighted several past experiences, biases, and prejudices that impacted my interpretation of and approach to

this study (Creswell 2009, 2013). I challenged myself by confronting my introverted tendencies by interviewing participants (which was uncomfortable for me), and attempted to build social capital with participants by doing so.

Informal member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), also called respondent validation, were used to obtain feedback from interviewees regarding my findings in progress (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Considered the most important technique to establish credibility, I went back to the participants so they judged my interpretation of the data and provided suggestions for better capture of perspective (Merriam, 2009). Participant feedback allowed for improved representation and interpretation of their experiences (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Merriam, 2009). I sent the participants a copy of my comments, observations, and interpretations for confirmation of accuracy and my understanding.

Access to the individual interview questions were provided in an encrypted electronic file. Encrypted electronic access to the questions allowed participants to prepare their answers to expedite time limitations and allow for more thoughtful responses. Questions included topics such as specific social capital opportunities and solo librarian factors that may influence these activities. Questions flowed from one question to the next with transitional phrases. Encrypted audio recordings as well as researcher notes were saved from the interview, and subsequently, responses were transcribed.

In an effort to record and organize the data, the interview protocol included one open-ended question per page recording (Moustakas, 1991). I recorded the responses and my reactions to the interviewee's comments via memoing (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al.,

2013). Memoing is writing a narrative describing my reflections about the data, analyzing their meaning, and contemplating my thought processes (Creswell, 2013; Edmonson & Irby, 2008; Miles et al., 2013). I implemented memoing throughout the data collection process. Words are the most basic focus of the data and the medium, so memoing contributed to my coding (Miles et al., 2013).

In addition, to allow for possible technical difficulties, a back-up battery for the encrypted digital audio-recording device and a back-up audio-recording device were available. I implemented a collaborative interviewing strategy by welcoming participants to also ask other questions (Moustakas, 1994), received participant feedback from my interpretations of their comments, and received participant feedback before my final report (Creswell, 2013) to help extinguish any withholding of information and support open discussions. The participants were involved themselves in social capital and as solo librarians, and therefore cared about the results of the interview; they talked as friends (van Manen, 1990).

Next, notes were scanned to create encrypted digital copies of hard copies and saved to an external hard drive. The encrypted digital notes as well as the encrypted audio recording were saved to the internet cloud using Dropbox, a secure internet storage platform. I implemented reflexivity (Creswell, 2009, 2013) throughout the study, and was conscious and forthright with my identified biases, values, and personal and professional history. In addition, I included reflexive comments to discuss how what I brought to the research impacted my interpretation of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Codes emerged during analysis, and were recoded (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Edmonson & Irby, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Morgan, 1997). Codes are “labels that assign

symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles et al., 2013, p. 71). “Chunks” (Miles et al., 2013, p. 71) of data were assigned codes or terms (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Miles et al., 2013) based on the actual language of the data (Creswell, 2009). By performing this process, I began analyzing and interpreting the data’s meanings (Miles et al., 2013). Therefore, I easily and quickly pinpointed data and categorized the data with similar chunks for further analysis and drawing conclusions (Edmonson & Irby, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Miles et al., 2013). Codes evolved throughout data analysis (Creswell, 2009).

The inductive process is when a theory is identified based on what the data says (Moustakas, 1994). I obtained the “experiential experiences from subjects” (van Manen, 1984, p. 42) and performed a thematic analysis. Patterns and field notes led me to several themes that were refined as data were reviewed using inductive analysis (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1984). I isolated thematic statements to determine essential themes or “structures of experience” (van Manen, 1984, p. 59). I used both the highlighting approach and line-by-line approach to determine themes. Essential statements or phrases were highlighted, circled, or underlined. In addition, sentences were read line-by-line and recurring themes and commonalities were noted and phrases and statements were lifted (van Manen, 1984). Themes are answers to the question “what is it that makes this lived experience what it is?” (van Manen, 1984, p. 41). As the process evolved, themes were dropped, added, or edited.

### **Data Analysis**

In this qualitative study, the researcher was integral to data analysis (Creswell, 2009). By understanding and interpreting the data, the process of analysis relied upon the

researcher to discover meaning during the process through interpretation (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Interpretation built upon analysis through the researcher's "intuition, past experiences, emotion" (Wolcott, 2009, p. 30). Analysis occurred during the chunking, categorizing, and coding, despite any discrepancies (Wolcott, 2009).

I had adapted Moustakas' (1994) data analysis procedure to include the individual interviews. The steps I applied to analyze the data include:

1. Describing the Epoche (my perceptions of the phenomenon)
2. Recording via encrypted digital audio the individual interviews and transcribing them verbatim. This will document the statements made by the participants through verbatim examples
3. Specifying the reoccurring meanings of the experience, including verbatim examples
4. Clustering the meanings into themes, including verbatim examples
5. Synthesizing the themes into detailed descriptions.

I bracketed my perceptions about the solo middle school librarians in Step 1. I applied reflexivity to eliminate my perceptions so I could listen clearly and truly hear about the phenomenon through the responses of the participants. This was a difficult process due to my proximity to and opinions of the phenomenon.

Steps 2 and 3 occurred simultaneously. I transposed the encrypted audio-recordings and then reviewed the transcripts. In Step 2 I noted meaningful comments from relevant statements (Moustakas, 1994). In Step 3, I organized reoccurring meanings of the experience together. Each participant was quoted and reported in Chapter IV as supporting data from the individual interviews.

In Step 4 I clustered the meanings into 5 themes. Step 5 involved synthesizing the themes into detailed descriptions of the phenomenon. Quotations from the participants and my experiences with the process peppered the synthesis. The results are vivid description of the “meanings and essences” of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122).

### **Summary**

Chapter III focused on the research design, participant selection, instruments, procedures, and data analysis. I described the data collection process, and steps I implemented to deter bias. Last, the data analysis procedures were explained.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Results**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate a sample of solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district as they shared their participation and experiences with librarian-to-librarian social capital. In this study, qualitative data were collected from interviews and used to organize the ideas of five solo middle school librarians. In this chapter, I present the results of the qualitative data and the analysis of the data under the guiding research questions.

#### **Research Questions**

1. How do solo middle school librarians perceive social capital experiences with other solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district?
2. How do solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district perceive social capital experiences with other school librarians outside of their large Texas school district?
3. How do solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district perceive factors that influence social capital experiences?

#### **Analysis of Data**

This phenomenological study was completed to investigate a sample of solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district as they shared their participation and experiences with librarian-to-librarian social capital. Using the transcriptions from participants' interview responses, I described and interpreted the data to understand the phenomenon. The analysis of the transcripts started with circling important phrases from



each participant's response to interview questions. After color-coding patterns of responses, themes emerged. The themes became categories and repetitions of responses were noted.

This chapter includes the results of the data analysis. First, I described the characteristics of the solo middle school librarians who participated in the interviews. Next, the results of the quantitative analysis were examined.

### **Participant Characteristics**

The five solo middle school librarians that participated in the interviews include four females and one male. Three participants' ethnicity is white and two participants' ethnicity is Hispanic. All participant ages are between 40-49 years. The total number of years' experience as a solo middle school librarian for four librarians is between four to ten years and one participant's experience ranging between 11-15 years. All hold at least a master's degree except for the male participant who only holds a bachelor's degree. All meet the NCLB requirement of a highly qualified teacher.

Demographic information about the participants in the study is represented in Table 3. Gender, ethnicity, age group, range of years' experience as a solo middle school librarian, highest level of education, and NCLB highly qualified teacher requirement are represented.

Table 3

*Demographic Information of Participants*

| Participant | Gender | Ethnicity | Age Range | Years Experience | Highest Level Education | NCLB |
|-------------|--------|-----------|-----------|------------------|-------------------------|------|
| 1           | F      | H         | 40-49     | 4-10             | Doctorate               | Yes  |
| 2           | F      | W         | 40-49     | 11-15            | Masters                 | Yes  |
| 3           | F      | H         | 40-49     | 4-10             | Masters+                | Yes  |
| 4           | F      | W         | 40-49     | 4-10             | Masters+                | Yes  |
| 5           | M      | W         | 40-49     | 4-10             | Bachelors               | Yes  |

**Results**

The results of a pilot study (Lilly Hughes, 2013) completed in 2013 sparked my interest in investigating the social capital activities of the solo middle school librarian. I investigated a sample of middle school solo librarians in a large Texas school district as they shared their participation and experiences with librarian-to-librarian social capital. First, the social capital activities in which solo middle school librarians and other librarians participate were identified. Second, the social capital activities in which solo middle school librarians participate with other solo librarians within their school district were identified. Third, the factors that influence the solo middle school librarian's ability to participate in social capital activities were examined.

To investigate a sample of solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district as they shared their participation and experiences with librarian-to-librarian social

capital, I conducted interviews with each independently and face-to-face. Each participant was asked the same 16 questions. I asked additional questions during the interviews when needed for information to enhance my understanding. All of the interviews were recorded on my digital audio device and cassette recorder. After each interview I transcribed it and then member-checked, allowing the interviewee to clarify any inaccuracies. This procedure ensured clarity of their views and comments.

Analysis of the transcribed interviews began with my identification of significant statements, categories, and descriptions. Grouping the significant statements, I established themes. As per Moustakas' (1994) recommendation, I closed analysis with the recognition of the essence of the study and what inspired me.

I met the solo middle school librarians for the interview at a location of their choosing. Participant 1 chose to invite me to her home on a Saturday morning, and Participants 2-5 invited me to their library during school hours. All interviews lasted at least 1 hour and 15 minutes with some lasting 1 hour and 45 minutes.

**Participant 1.** She and her three pets welcomed me into her home on a warm Saturday morning. Dressed casually and offering me iced tea and a comfortable chair, she needed clarification on the definition of social capital. We soon began our discussion of the 16 questions that guided the study. Overall, Participant 1 is weary from physical and mental fatigue from being a solo middle school librarian and as a result finds social capital experiences with her colleagues in-district to be “critical” to her professional success. She shared, “[My principal] said, ‘I want you to stop talking about how not having an assistant is impacting you because people are thinking that you’re just whining about it.’” She values most the informal 30 minutes before district monthly meetings and

stated, “We all think it’s the most important time of the meeting is the time we get to spend together in that 30 minutes...just because we are alone.” In addition, daily electronic interaction with other solo middle school librarians helps her keep in touch with other solo middle school librarians and monthly evening book clubs fosters close relationships where Participant 1 said, “I just get to know them and trust them.” Informal interaction is valued more so than formal interaction. She said,

I trust the ones the most I’ve had the most interactions with. Outside the profession. Meeting for happy hour or participating in book clubs. When you spend time with people you get to know what that person is all about. And if I had a question about something or needed advice I would know exactly who to ask . . . we so look forward to the time we get to spend together. It doesn’t even have to be structured...we talk about things that we’re concerned about at school and how we’re doing this in handling this.

When in formal settings, interaction and training provided by colleagues in-district is preferred to that provided from outside of the district because, “It speaks volumes about their knowledge of being a librarian at our level . . . to me it’s more valuable and creditable.” She also credits the other solo middle school librarians as each exhibiting their individual strength, area of expertise, or special knowledge.

Participant 1 is a member of a few professional organizations to remain informed of professional topics; however, she does not attend conferences due to lack of professional and financial support from her principal. Despite lack of support from her principal, advocacy for her program and profession is always at the forefront of her mind. She said, “Advocacy never ends and it is ongoing.” Although she is allowed to attend

monthly librarians' meetings, she is not allowed to close the library to do so; if she is absent, she can, however, request a retired librarian substitute. She absolutely trusts and respects her solo middle school librarian colleagues in the district and shared she “looks forward to the time we get to spend together. It doesn't have to be structured because everyone is open to sharing; they are upfront, honest, sympathetic, and eager to help.” Participant 1 believed the biggest barriers to experiencing social capital are librarians working alone, and that educators do not realize librarians are teachers and librarians must “prove themselves” as instructional leaders at the campus.

**Participant 2.** Walking into a library space filled with natural light, contemporary tables, chairs, shelving, lounge seating, glass partitions, and that has been open for only 2 years, I was greeted by a vivacious librarian working with a handful of student assistants. After a welcomed tour of the space, Participant 2 and I sat down at a table in the middle of the library and immediately opened the Smart Waters I provided to enjoy an easy conversation covering the 16 questions that guided the study. Seemingly relaxed and eager to chat, she finds the district's monthly librarians' meetings “pretty helpful,” especially the informal discussion time 30 minutes before the meeting begins; she notes that 30 minutes isn't enough time to really discuss what's going on at campuses. She said, “I miss a chance to get to really talk about what's going on at our campuses.” However, she does “try to make a goal to incorporate something from everything we do so otherwise why bother to go [to the meeting]?” Daily electronic interaction with other solo middle school librarians are imperative, and “crucial” informal interaction is valued more so than formal interaction. From those discussions, however, she has noticed “from that informal [discussion] it [professional development] becomes formal.” She also

credits the other solo middle school librarians as each exhibiting their individual strengths, area of expertise, or special knowledge. She provides staff development to teachers and is considered part of the campus leadership team, and attends in-state professional conferences because she is supported professionally and somewhat financially by her principal. She also utilizes technology to expand her social capital experiences via social media such as Twitter, web sites, blogs, a variety of Web 2.0 tools such as Google Applications, and technology-focused organizations such as Texas Computer Education Association (TCEA).

Participant 2 is overwhelmed by the job duties as a solo middle school librarian and relies heavily upon volunteers in the library. She said,

Volunteers are really important because it allows a librarian to not feel tethered to the space so you can collaborate with more teachers on their time. It also offers opportunities to go and attend to the part of other things that are going on outside of the space whether it's a meeting or other PD [professional development] or even a meeting with administration to talk about different things. The other thing is just to have another adult in the room to help supervise because you constantly have a variety of things [going on]; every day is different.

She believes professional organizations such as the American Library Association (ALA) and the Texas Computer Education Association (TCEA) are “critical” for social capital activities to foster and to defend institutions from becoming “myopic.” She finds involvement “invigorating” and “motivating” and contributes by presenting at conferences, writing articles for journals such as *Library Media Connection*, and sharing on social media. If participation of social capital experiences demanded the library to be

closed, she does believe her principal would support that; when absent Participant 2 does secure a substitute. She absolutely trusts and respects her solo middle school librarian colleagues in the district, although sometimes she feels she is sometimes “misunderstood” due to her desire to help and share. She said,

I just feel like it is wrong not to institute some possibilities that could really affect change. Because if we don't we might as well just cash it all in now as a planet, as a nation, as a state, as a city, as an individual. So I just tend to think way too big sometimes but it's just kind of what feed stocks that desire to help and share.

**Participant 3.** Nestled down a long dark corridor of the middle school, Participant 3's library, in capsuled as box-shaped, all dark wood, with canned lighting, and impeccably maintained shelves, waft the faint scent of mold. Peppered with modern designed portraits of famous young adult authors both past and present, bright book displays, and some comfortable seating and task lighting for student use, a beleaguered librarian invited me to sit at a table for a chat. Setting up my recording devices and providing the Smart Waters I brought did not prepare me to see a Library Services central office personnel person arrive anticipating another meeting with all middle school librarians. Realizing the other meeting was at a different campus, the central office personnel left, causing me to conclude my conversation with Participant 3 was on a shortened time frame. We quickly dove into the 16 questions that guided the study so that Participant 3 could meet the other librarians after our interview.

Participant 3 acknowledged the importance of the district-level middle school librarians' meetings, yet bemoaned “our meetings require us to travel to different campuses which can be a hindrance.” She does, however, find the meetings, especially

the informal 30 minutes before the meeting, “the most valuable.” Ironically, she usually only shares during the formal session of the meeting due to not wishing to be viewed as overbearing. Overall, even more important to her are the informal communications during the day via instant messaging, going out to dinner, and book club. She appreciates opportunities to share, especially “programming ideas and great things that are happening in our libraries.” She explained, “The most valuable resources are my co-librarians . . . we are family.” She also credits the other solo middle school librarians as each exhibiting their individual strengths, area of expertise, or special knowledge. She conceded, however, that without a library assistant, she had to let go of some programming ideas, such as creating promotional reading incentive videos, “because it got just way too much to do [without an aide].”

Participant 3 recognized the vital role professional organizations such as Texas Library Association (TLA) and ALA play for library advocacy. She emphasized, “I am very much an advocate of people being involved in the professional organizations . . . it’s just vital for the networking and opening up your web of resources and people;” she currently serves on a state book selection committee. She prefers to experience social capital experiences face-to-face, or occasionally over video social media such as blab.im, but struggles with the after-school hours it takes to participate in these activities. She is the host of the librarians’ book club. If she were not alone in the library, she could participate more regularly. In addition, if she had a library assistant she would not have to close the library when she was away. She said, “Since we lost our assistants, that has been a huge burden on us to be able to get professional development.” She believes in advocating for libraries, and does receive some professional support from her principal to



attend conferences and collaborate with other librarians, but zero financial support. She said many impediments hinder social capital, including but not limited to “time is a factor. Money is a factor. Closing the library is a factor . . . lack of support personnel is a hindrance . . . you can’t run a library without a manager, and our library assistants were our managers.”

**Participant 4.** With dark wood shelving, dim canned lighting, chairs and tables in disarray, and a messy makeshift circulation desk to greet me, Participant 4’s library exuded chaos one afternoon of a student early-release day. A beleaguered librarian invited me to sit at a table among a King Arthur’s Court display for a chat, so I set up my recording devices and provided her with a Smart Water. We quickly dove into the 16 questions that guided the study because I could see by the librarian’s tired eyes she was ready to call it a day and go home to rest. Participant 4 echoed her colleagues in recognizing the “sharing” time the 30 minutes before the monthly librarians’ meeting as being “a really good time [for] sharing new things.” However, she does have a smaller cadre of librarians she defers to for ideas because “since we don’t have library aides, we’re trying to figure out systems. So we spend a lot of our time trying to create systems that allow the library to run more smoothly.” She also credits the other solo middle school librarians as each exhibiting their individual strengths, area of expertise, or special knowledge. Feeling isolated, she emphasized monthly meetings as her “lifeline.” She almost cried when she said

I could not continue in my position if I didn’t have the opportunity to go to the library meetings once a month and count on other librarians in between to bounce off ideas and sometimes get a little encouragement . . . it is so nice to have a

chance to talk with someone else who knows exactly where I'm coming from because we're the only ones on our campus . . . it's a lonely business. I have had an assistant before and it was wonderful.

Participant 4 also finds her solo middle school librarian colleagues to be trustworthy and her local and state librarian professional organizations such as TLA and workshops at her education service center. However, she does interpret the larger professional organizations as being out of touch with reality in school libraries, and therefore relies upon the advice and input from her local colleagues. She said, "My world is different from what I was taught in library school." As a result, she works hard to cultivate a strong positive relationship with her principal because "so much of my success depends on the principal support." She does not close the library when she attends meetings, and instead relies upon volunteers to circulate materials and supervise students when she is away. Otherwise, her principal would not allow her to leave. Participant 4's principal does allow her to pay for attending conferences with library fundraisers. She does not supplement face-to-face interactions with social media. In addition, she believes "social capital time is hindered by time and inconvenience." She emphatically stated, "So some of me not participating in social capital is self-imposed; it's physically not possible [without an assistant]."

**Participant 5.** Participant 5 jubilantly greeted me at the door of his library where public voting was taking place, and we walked through the sparsely decorated cavern to a back conference room to address the 16 questions that guided this study. Grateful for the Smart Water I provided, he began to talk about how he manages his library before I can even set up my recording devices. He wanted me to know first and foremost that he

could not provide the programming and instructional support he does without his group of 10 volunteers from the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). He declared, “I couldn’t run [the library] without it [PTA volunteers].” I redirected him to the questions at hand and he immediately identified the librarians’ monthly meetings as the “biggest way” he is involved with social capital. He identified the “social time” 30 minutes before the meeting and then added, “The only way to get ideas is to bounce them off each other and use them when you get back to school.” Currently an official mentor to a new librarian in his district, Participant 5 does not attend book club, participate in social media for personal or professional use, nor reach out to those outside the district for social capital endeavors. Instead, he said, “I kind of just gravitate to the people around me and it’s probably even more so the people whose schools are in close proximity to me . . . the only things that I do that are outside of this little realm is go to TLA [annual conference].” He also credited the other solo middle school librarians as each exhibiting their individual strengths, area of expertise, or special knowledge.

Feeling support from his principal professionally but not financially, Participant 5 pays his own way to professional conferences and workshops from his personal pocket. In general, unless he is particularly sought out professionally, he does not willingly share out his ideas or expertise because while he would “love to be able to do more of the things I actually do...if I had a library assistant I could do more.” He does, however, recognize the importance of staying current to best practices through organizations such as TCEA and TLA. From these organizations he stated, “Every year you [learn] and oh my gosh, I could do so much more. If I had another adult to work with, instead of a different person every day.” The “eduspeak” of many professional organizations, he

said, “turns me off,” so he remains a lurker and instead focuses on social capital experiences with other solo middle school librarians in his district. He claimed, “I’ve never had anything but positive experiences with my colleagues. I’ve heard that other people have not. But it’s never been me.” Overall, he believes they “value each other.”

### **Emerging Themes**

Using the transcriptions from participants’ interview responses, I described and interpreted the data to understand the phenomenon. The analysis of the transcripts started with circling important phrases from each participant’s response to interview questions. I then wrote rich descriptions of each interview. After color-coding patterns of responses, themes emerged. In Table 4, the emerging themes are presented with the number of times the theme was mentioned. The categories became themes and repetitions of responses were noted.

Table 4

#### *Emerging Themes*

| Theme                      | Number of Times Mentioned |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Collegiality               | 156                       |
| Professional Organizations | 69                        |
| Principal Supports         | 69                        |
| Librarians are Teachers    | 26                        |
| Isolation                  | 50                        |

**Collegiality.** The solo middle school librarians value their district-level monthly meetings, held specifically for their level. All participants stated the importance and priority these monthly meetings have. Participant 5 said, “I think the monthly meetings

are the most important [social capital activity].” Participant 1 shared, “Because we are alone, it’s another professional adult that understands what we’re going through.”

Participant 3 agreed by stating, “We as middle school librarians have the opportunity to meet. We have a district librarians meeting . . . to get together and collaborate and discuss and learn with each other.” Participant 1 reinforced her colleagues and stated, “We all think it [monthly meetings] is the most important time of the meeting is the time we get to spend together in that 30 minutes.” Participant 5 added,

Opportunities to discuss, learn, and share with other middle school librarians within his district is extremely important. Even a solo librarian isn’t an island. You have to have people who are knowledgeable . . . they’re so good to get ideas from. If we didn’t have a monthly meeting I think it would be more difficult than it is . . . a lot of times I come out of there my track gets reset.

Participant 3 exclaimed, “The most successful and in-depth meetings have been the informal ones.” These examples exemplify the notion that successful schools encourage teacher collegiality (Johnston, Markle, & Arhar, 1988). Of greater importance to the solo middle school librarians are the optional 30 minutes before the monthly meeting where unstructured topics may be discussed. Participant 4 expressed,

Formal school district opportunities occur monthly with our middle school librarian meetings through library services. And so there’s generally we always have discussion time at the beginning . . . at the beginning that can be directed or just open. There’s lots of sharing on how do you do things and we’re real good about finding out from each other at those meetings what do you, what do you like, how do you do this, and that’s a really good time to find those things out.

The solo middle school librarians appreciate this time. Participant 5 said,

We have time to socially interact once a month at a meeting. Thirty minutes before the meeting you can come at the very beginning and it's a structured meeting after that . . . it's the only way to get ideas is to bounce them off each other and use them when you get back to school.

Participant 1 restated the importance of the monthly meeting and the informal 30 minutes beforehand:

One of the best formal opportunities that we have in the district is meeting once a month on our levels . . . we have the opportunity to get to the meeting about 30 minutes before the meeting starts. We discuss concerns, ask questions give feedback, and pick each other's brain . . . that has been the best part of our meetings by far.

The informal 30 minutes before the monthly meeting is so valued, Participant 2 said, "I miss a chance to get to really talk about what's going on at our campuses, without any kind of structure. I find that really helpful although 30 minutes is not a lot of time."

Participant 2 restated her thoughts and expressed opportunities to discuss, learn, or share with other solo middle school librarians within her district.

Really important. I think the informal is super important and I'm also wishing there was some way that we could have a structured informal afternoon were more regular. Leave for us to meet . . . where we can get together and we knew we would be sharing and getting ideas and brainstorming whatever it might be. Or just talk about issues we're having. I mean because obviously the more brains

you have working on a problem the more possible solutions you can come up with.

These examples exemplify the research stating opportunities for informal collegial interaction positively affects student achievement (Penuel et al., 2010).

Value extends to relationships, where Participant 4 “trusts” her other librarians “to share experiences with.” Participant 4 said,

They trust me, and so I try as hard as I can to be a sharing person . . . I want to build that relationship with my colleagues of sharing. I want to be of value to them as much as they are of value to me. The reciprocity of it.

Participant 3 shared, “I love my middle school colleagues. We always refer to ourselves as a family. We are a family unit. We are very close.” The feeling is mutual for Participant 5, who firmly declared her most valuable professional resources “are my professional colleagues . . . because we are the ones who are actually in the trenches doing the work.” Participant 3 held the same feeling and stated, “The most valuable resources are my co-librarians, or my librarians in the district . . . we work together as a team and collaborate and come together with ideas. It’s just better for everybody.”

By utilizing the informal opportunities for social capital, the solo middle school librarians learn to whom to address in times of need. Participant 1 said,

When you spend time with people you get to know what that person is all about. And if I had a question about something or needed advice I would know exactly who to ask . . . we so look forward to the time we get to spend together. It doesn’t even have to be structured just on our own we talk about things.

At various times throughout the year, the solo middle school librarians may work together during the school day. Participant 2 shared,

With early release days I'm planning on working with another library to talk about just some stuff, some ideas to share . . . to get some ideas about different kinds of maker space stuff. So we work within the parameters of what the schedule is . . . so there's a lot of partnerships like that, that happen."

Participant 3 said, "It's great to get together and hash out ideas. So I've actually personally asked people to collaborate with me individually or informally have a mixer to share." Participant 1 stated, "They [librarians] seek me out like I seek them out for particular issues or problems all the time. Email, instant message, face-to-face, phone calls; it goes both ways. I think they trust me about as much as I trust them." Participant 3 expressed, "Everyone has their own niche and talent, so it's nice to be able to get together as a cohesive whole . . . we all have our own individual talents and strengths and together we are the whole enchilada."

To enhance the social capital opportunities of their monthly meetings, solo middle school librarians embrace technology. Couros (2015) said, "As educational leaders, we must promote and capitalize on open, connected learning" (p. 170). Participant 5 said,

Once a month meetings are probably the biggest way. Of course we do have IM and we're all on Skype IM that we're on day-to-day so little questions pop up or if you have an idea or something you can share it that way. And everybody also shares through their email.

This layer of instant feedback in a fast-paced school library is a best practice. The activity also builds relationships because, "The three most important words in education



are: relationships, relationship, relationships. Without them, we have nothing.” (Couros, 2015, p. 68). Participant 4 reinforced Participant 5’s thoughts and shared,

It [social capital] almost always starts communication with an instant message, and if we can’t get it done through that we will pick up the phone. But we want an immediate back-and-forth feedback. Email is too slow. We need that instant feedback. A couple of buddies, we text even after work. We’ll be thinking of something, so it goes beyond the school day.

Participant 3 added,

I’m trying to try technology and post on social media . . . we get together on a regular basis just to talk and share out. That is a very valuable group to me. Because we talk not only about programming but also about advocacy . . . on my time.

Other technologies enhance social capital. Participant 2 added, “We do a lot of things through Google Docs and sharing in Google Drive. Outsourcing ideas and things like that . . . we’re taking some type of initiative to learn from each other; it’s because we have a direct need for it.” Participant 2 went on and stated,

I think things like Twitter have been helpful because it’s allowed me to see what other libraries are doing . . . instant messaging is helpful because it allows me to show I’m available and that I’m receptive and responsive . . . there are certain people I know to go to for certain things based on their areas of strength and what they’ve decided to become their daily work.

Solo middle school librarians use a combination of face-to-face opportunities and technology to enhance social capital opportunities. Participant 3 shared, “I usually like to

get together in person and share about what I've learned informally at dinner with my colleagues . . . we do BLABing which is something through Twitter." Participant 3 said,

Informal opportunities [to meet] are the most valuable . . . we take it upon ourselves to get together and discuss. We can do that either through instant message . . . or just meet for dinner. Or, for example, I have a book club mixer for the librarians . . . [we also] share programming ideas and great things that are happening in our libraries.

Participant 4, in response to the sharing at meetings stated,

I just would go back to school and try to do it [what I've learned] and try to do it and generally follow up with a phone call or instant message. Just a kind of check in and follow up. All the librarians are sharing new things . . . we have such different strengths . . . people have different skill sets and interests and needs for their school.

Social capital is important to the solo middle school librarians, but not all are happy with each other all of the time, although they are interdependent (Deal, Purinton, & Waetjen, 2008). Participant 5 said,

I've never had anything but positive experiences with my colleagues. I've heard that other people have not . . . if I'm part of a group I've always felt like I've been included and my comments were taken as being just as important as anyone else's. And I've always respected whatever anyone else has said . . . the librarians in our district are so willing to give their ideas and their information. I mean they will help you. We value each other. Some are more disgruntled than others . . . I

like all the people that are my colleagues. They wouldn't say it to me but to the side I can hear disgruntled [voices]."

Participant 2 values the social capital time together, yet admitted, "I feel basically misunderstood a lot of times . . . But I do think they get it and they value my input, and like what I have to offer." Participant 4 recognizes she must be proactive to receive assistance from other solo middle school librarians. She stated,

I have to ask . . . there's only a few who really would focus their attention on me and I really, I value that and count on it . . . If I don't have that vibe of absolutely no problem [they'll help] then it's really hard for me to ask anyone. If there's some hesitancy to take a minute to explain something or give me some advice then I'd rather try to figure it out myself or go someplace else.

**Professional organizations.** The solo middle school librarians in this study participate to various degrees in local, state, and national professional organizations. The solo middle school librarians engage in face-to-face interactions and contribute electronically to organizations such as: (a) Texas Library Association (TLA), (b) American Library Association (ALA), (c) Texas Computer Education Association (TCEA), and subdivisions thereof. Not all solo middle school librarians agree on the significance and applicability of each organization on their professional responsibilities; membership in a professional organization is less common than other organizations such as sports, interest, or idealistic groups (Lin & Erickson, 2008).

National professional organizations are important to several solo middle school librarians, and educators from several disciplines agree in the importance of participation in professional organizations to enhance professional skills (Kasar & Clark, 2000).

Members of professional organizations “take care of each other” (Sinek, 2014, p. 18).

Participant 3 believes involvement in professional organizations is vital to the profession.

Participant 3 explained,

I am very involved in both TLA and ALA. I am a member of YART. I’m actually running for chair elect of YART this year, which is the Young Adult Round Table. With ALA I’m also a member of YALSA [Young Adult Library Services Association] and I’m currently serving on the selection committee for that. I am very much an advocate of people being involved in their professional organizations . . . it’s just vital for the networking and opening up your web of resources and people. Not only on the state level, but on a national level.

She continued and shared receiving professional advice and information from a professional organization was

Vital because that’s what the professional organization is what supports us. So they are the one who will have our backs for advocacy, they are the ones who are going to support us with programming ideas. ALA is excellent at doing that.

Participant 2 agreed receiving information from professional organizations is

Really important . . . any organization can become too closed into a little myopic. So going outside and looking what other places are doing is extremely invigorating and motivating . . . it’s crucial to look outside in the business communities, entrepreneurially, technology, that kind of stuff, too. What’s trending in the real world.

Participant 5 concurred with the importance of professional organization and declared, “It’s very important to stay current with what other people are doing all over the country.”

State professional organizations are more important to most of the solo middle school librarians. The research supports professional organizations providing professional development opportunities as imperative for student achievement (Dow, 2013). Whatever it takes to attend annual conference, most solo middle school librarians are willing to do whatever it takes to get there. Participant 4 said, “TLA is our voice.” She expanded on the statement and shared,

I definitely feel a connection to TLA. I’m not a member of ALA anymore because of the cost . . . I feel it’s more distant unless it’s relevant to my situation or my priorities. I use ALA as a resource rarely . . . I go to TLA [annual conference] every year if possible. A lot of people to TCEA . . . but I still feel my comfort is with TLA . . . it’s more practical.

Participant 5 is also dedicated to TLA, and related, “I do pay my own way to TLA [annual conference]. I pay for my own hotel. I could pay for it with the book fair money but I never use it because I want to use it for school staff.” Participant 1 is more lukewarm toward any professional organization and dryly mentioned she belongs to ALA and TLA. She accesses resources such as “award winners book lists, resource that help me advocate.” She expressed she thought library professional organizations were “relatively important.”

Attending a professional organizations' conference or accessing the professional organization's resources doesn't ensure the solo middle school librarian is fully engaged in its offerings. Participant 5 explained,

I go to TLA but I don't contribute anything to it. I've been a part of blogs before, but really that's not my strong suit. But I do get stuff from them. I'm more of a lurker than a contributor . . . sometimes the eduspeak just puts me off.

Various degrees of participation depend on the interests and resources of the solo middle school librarian. Contradicting most of her colleagues, Participant 2 mentioned,

I've lapsed my membership [in TLA] just because of cost and because I feel ambivalent about TLA . . . I feel like TCEA is a much more progressive thinking organization . . . TLA is behind the times . . . I just get always get more out of TCEA conference than a TLA conference. And I've presented at both conferences . . . I belong to TCEA, I'm a member of ALA and AASL [American Association of School Librarians] . . . and then the other is ISTE [International Society for Technology in Education] . . . I look more to AASL more than I do TLA . . . AASL and TCEA really enriched my practice and constantly gives me new ideas . . . I don't always go to conferences just because of cost, not because of lack of desire to go.

Contradicting the importance of professional organizations altogether, Participant 2 surprisingly noted,

I would say I get more from non-librarians than I do librarians because partly I've been doing this for a while . . . but I'm looking for more. I guess I always want to learn more and I get bored really easily.

Web resources and technology from professional organizations receive mixed reviews from solo middle school librarians. Participant 4 said,

A lot of it [professional organizations] seems to be how to use technology [for sharing] different ideas for promoting books, reaching kids outside the library, [or] using social media. Probably a lot more of it is inspiration rather than a blueprint for what I would do here.

Others do use technology to expand upon and share what they learn at conferences.

Participant 2 said,

I do try to share what we do when we go to a conference within the district. We would create some type of Google Doc and share the resources and email that out to everyone and if there's time at our PD sessions we try to schedule 30 minutes share time where we can talk about what we learned.

Participant 4 further shared, "I've gone in waves with social media . . . but I do like to follow experts or leaders in the field or authors." She also admitted, "I'm a member of several ListServes but I don't truly pay any attention to them."

Despite the resources professional organizations provide, the solo middle school librarians prefer social capital opportunities with and from their colleagues (Couros, 2015). Even the conference experience itself is no match for actual time the solo middle school librarians spend together. Participant 4 said, "Probably the best part of it [TLA] is sharing in the casual setting whether it's at dinner after workshops; just talking about it. It's more informal sharing." Participant 3 reinforced this idea but in a more formal setting. She shared,

The meetings I really like are the meetings right after TLA. At our formal meetings we always share out what was learned at TLA and the resources we gather while we're at conference. Which is always a great thing to do . . . and then we get to take that back to our campuses and share with our faculty and students.

Participant 4 blatantly stated, "It is most important to get information from them [middle school librarians]. Less so from professional organizations, because I think a lot of our professional organizations are cut off to the realities of the schools."

**Principal support.** The solo middle school librarians experience varying levels of support from their campus principal. Each recognizes the critical role principal support plays in their taking advantage of social capital experiences (Leana, 2010). Participant 4 said,

I have worked really hard to cultivate that relationship . . . being friendly, trying to be welcoming, trying to be accommodating for things that are important to them. Getting over in my mind the fear when I do advocate for the library, that to be able to talk in a straight up manner. I guess I've been fortunate that I've had great relationships with my principals so I don't know what it's like for somebody who doesn't have that and so that is a factor in who I relate to with other librarians.

She emphasized, "So much of my success depends on the principal support. So I've been very lucky." Participant 3 echoed Participant 4 and stated her principal is "absolutely very supportive . . . a lot of the principals are very supportive about having us get together."



Participant 5 agreed with the other solo middle school librarians with one caveat and said, “The only person I answer to is our principal. And everything I’ve ever asked him to do has been, ‘Of course, do that’ if it’s going to be good for kids . . . but he’s always been supportive of me.” These librarians recognized the significance of principal support to their success (Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004).

Other principals show support of their solo middle school librarian by allowing them to take a leadership role on the campus or attend professional workshops during the school year (Frank et al., 2004). Participant 2 triumphantly stated, “Almost every time we have a staff development day I’m asked to do a session.” She added, “My principal is pretty supportive . . . he saw me as part of the leadership team and wants me to provide sessions to teachers.” On the other end of the spectrum, Participant 1 expressed, “They do allow me to go to meetings as long as I have permission with plenty of advance notice.” She is not allowed to provide professional development to teachers and has been told, “There’s not a lot of time for the library to present.”

Principal support may be distributed in a number of ways. Regarding the opportunity to attend conferences or workshops, Participant 4 shared,

I try to make it as easy as possible for them to say yes. I don’t ask for the funding to go to these events. I . . . use the fundraising from book fair . . . not from the campus budget . . . so they’re very supportive but I try to make it so it’s easy for them to be supportive of it. I get my substitute, I make sure everything’s okay, I pay for it with library funds.

Similarly, Participant 3 reported,

I co-presented a session on reading as a committee member at [my education service center]. Besides ALA and TLA I go to I also go to the young adult symposium and the [education service center library professional development day]. I go to ALAN [Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the NCTE] workshops. I've gone to the International Literacy Association conferences . . . if it's in the area or it's something I'm very interested in to go. By the way, I pay for all of this myself, out of my pocket. 100%. In the past I've asked leadership to fund my staff development . . . they were not willing to pay . . . [but] I do not ever want money to be an issue for me not going to get professional training so I have since paid my way 100% to everything I go to professionally.

On the opposite end of the spectrum regarding principal support, Participant 1 said, "I have been told there's no professional development money for librarians to go to conference because there is more important professional development for teachers because teachers are more important." Lack of principal support is a significant cause for teacher dissatisfaction (Hallinger, 2003). Participant 1 pays for TLA conference expenses on her own and said, "It's not true for other campuses . . . their principal pays for the conference and the travel expenses that are associated with it. But not mine." Participant 3 bemoaned, "I know some principals won't let librarians go to TLA or they won't provide financial assistance for them to go." Or, the principal will allow the librarian to attend a conference or workshop, but keeps the library closed while she or he is away. Participant 3 said, "Some campuses the principal will make them just shut the library down and not get a sub, which is not good, because then the library is not available to the students."

**Librarians are teachers.** Texas certified school librarians must have at least 2 years successful teaching experience, and are therefore teachers. All solo middle school librarians in this study are *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) highly qualified teachers. Opportunities to teach lay with students, teachers, administrators, other librarians, the librarians themselves as lifelong learners, and the community. As noted by Participant 5, “My job has totally changed in the past 25 years.” The job has evolved to be even more instructionally laden. As stated by Participant 2, “We need to reframe the perception of what the librarian does and what this space is about.” Participant 1 echoed the sentiment and flatly expressed, “They don’t realize that we were once teachers . . . in the 21<sup>st</sup> century a lot of people don’t understand what librarians do.”

The opportunity to plan collaboratively with campus teachers and leaders is critical to a library program’s success and appropriate use of resources, including access to the librarian (Lance, 2002c). Sometimes to provide for collaboration, alternatives must come to fruition. Participant 4 said, “I don’t close the library when I go to meetings. I have a parent volunteer who can come in . . . so I can attend the department meetings and the department head meetings.” She continued and said, “I wouldn’t get support for collaborating [with teachers] if I closed the library.” Yet working with teachers is not always easy to achieve. Participant 1 explained, “I am not given time to share information during professional development times. Again, I’ve been told there’s not a lot of time for the library to present . . . I wish I could be part of professional development activities throughout the year.”

More specifically, the solo middle school librarians are mindful of specific instructional strategies. Participant 2 expanded and stated, “Whenever I learn something

new, I think how can this be reframed within the context of our campus . . . in that it can support all of these TEKS and the readiness TEKS. Participant 2 shared,

I collaborate with the teacher. I try to incorporate some strategies that are just taking the content and reusing it a different way but also teaching the kids some types of thinking skills or more 21<sup>st</sup> century approaches that are going to help them be more self-sufficient and challenge them a little bit more.

Participant 5 commented there are challenges, however, to providing instruction:

If I'm going to do some sort of research or go to the lab with the class . . . if I'm going to preview any authors' books I need to go to all the reading classes. I need to do a book talk and those instances I have to put a library closed sign on the door and find a place for my [student] library assistant to go.

He went on and shared, "I just want to make sure that the kids know the current books now because I wish I would've known the current books when I was a kid . . . I'm a male role model."

Other ways the solo middle school librarians find instructional strategies from which to teach students include even more social capital experiences. Participant 3 shared,

I've gotten some very good ideas from what I've learned just either collaborating with my professional learning community or online sources such as social media. You know the last thing I did we went ton Pinterest and my little library student aides and I found things to [promote reading].

She went on and said,

I try to get people together so they can come up with programming ideas for the year. Or even it's just a calendar of events so that we can remember to hit the highlights for book displays, programming ideas, activities for the kids to do. It's great to get together and hash out those ideas.

**Isolation.** Teaching is a lonely profession (Chandler, 1983; Chenoweth, 2009; Costello, 1987; Davis, 1987; Dussault, et al., 1999; Elmore, 2000; Flinders, 1988; Goodlad & Klein, 1974; Levine, 1986; Lieberman & Miller, 1992, 1984; Little, 1990; Rosenholtz & Smylie, 1984; Rothberg, 1986; Zielinski & Hoy, 1983). Being a solo middle school librarian is interesting but also lonely work. To illustrate this point, Participant 4 said, "So it's a great business but it's a lonely business. I have had an assistant before and it was wonderful." Participant 4 expanded on the notion and claimed, "To me one of the most rewarding parts of the profession is getting to help another librarian who is also lonely. She continued with a confession:

[Opportunities to discuss learn, or share with other middle school librarians within your district] It is my lifeline. I could not continue in my position if I didn't have the opportunity to go to the library meetings once a month and count on other librarians in between to bounce off ideas and sometimes get a little encouragement. And we probably say most every time after those meetings it is so nice to have a chance to talk with someone else who knows exactly where I'm coming from because we're the only ones on our campus.

Participant 1 adamantly agreed and expressed, "The biggest barrier is that we are alone."

Isolated from other teachers, other librarians, and appropriate support staff, the solo middle school librarian has to prioritize daily goals and objectives (Siess, 2006). As

a result, higher-level professional activities get put aside as routine clerical support systems take over. Participant 4 stressed, “Especially since we don’t have library aides, we’re trying to figure out systems. So we spend a lot of our time trying to create systems that allow the library to run more smoothly.” She continued, “It’s tough to implement, it’s hard to find the time to actually implement these things that I do learn about . . . it’s hard to make a programming change, even a scheduling type change . . . it is not easy.”

Participant 3 elaborated upon the loss of professional activities and adamantly bemoaned,

Lack of support personnel is a hindrance. We have to, I mean all of the things we’re good at, sometimes get put on the back burner because we have to actually manage the library. Meaning we have to run circulation, or we have to shelve books, or run reports, or make sure the collection is developed. [It’s] the day to day running reports, overdue notices, whatever it may be for whatever it might be for the library. Because that has to be done.

She continued and emphatically declared,

Essentially you can’t run a library without a manager. And our library assistants were our managers. They managed our libraries which allowed us to be the professional and to interact where we need to interacting with the patrons whether they be student or teacher or colleagues. So sometimes we ran out of time to do that because we have to manage which is essential. And that’s why it’s so very important we have to properly staffed libraries.

Yes, some solo middle school librarians have student assistants during the school day, but child labor is not enough (Siess, 1997; Siess, 2006). Participant 5 shared,

That's where it gets impacted if you do have another adult assistant in here then the way you can be more involved in instruction in the classrooms that's the impact there. You have to have everyone come to you if you don't have someone who can command the ship while you're gone.

He continued by explaining his situation with adult volunteers, which is very much appreciated by the librarian (McGown, 2007).

I have support as far as the parents and PTA . . . they cover every day my lunch. Some days if I need them they have a person assigned before or after school to help with shelving or with laminating or other kinds of clerical duties . . . they help me run my book fairs. They supply money for authors . . . I couldn't run without them.

Participant 4 explained, "So if it were between not having a parent and closing the library that would cause a problem. I would have to keep the library open." Participant 5 said, "Every year you come out [from TLA conference] and oh my gosh! I could do so much more if I had another adult to work with instead of a different person [volunteer] every day."

Participant 5 explained a fabulous analogy regarding the idiocy of relying on adult volunteers instead of proper clerical assistance and described,

You wouldn't want to be a principal having to train a new person every day of the week that would be mind-boggling especially when you're trying to instruct kids and going to orientations and having to orientate the person at the front desk and I have kids now to do it.

Principals do not seem to understand the issue of a librarian being alone as problematic. Participant 1 lamented “[my principal] said, ‘I want you to stop talking about how not having an assistant is impacting you because people are thinking that you’re just whining about it.’” Only Participant 2’s principal offered hope when the principal would see “to close the library to go collaborate I think she realizes that there’s an issue . . . she’s like, ‘You do need somebody in here.’”

Because the solo middle school librarians are exhausted trying to maintain programming and services alone, they cannot perform at a professional level from which they aspire (Siess, 2006). This includes their ability to participate specifically in social capital experiences. Participant 5 said, “I’d love to be able to do more things than I actually do . . . if I had a library assistant I could do more.” Participant 3 shared, “But time is a factor. Money is a factor. Closing the library is a factor.” Participant 4 said,

So some of me not participating in social capital is self-imposed. . . it’s physically not possible . . . I’ve got to find this sustainable mode of operating the library and that’s hard because it’s fun operating at a high level but I couldn’t keep doing it . . . it’s too frustrating to be thinking well if I had more help, if I had an assistant I could be doing this, if I stay in that mindset then I can’t complete and do well with what I have now.

She continues to steadfastly express the situation:

Social capital time is hindered by time and inconvenience. When I had my aid I could plan together and bounce ideas. I was bouncing ideas off of her and then I had that energy to get things going and try things. It’s harder now for me to try new things because I don’t have much time to fail . . . I need to be pretty sure it’s



going to be worth my time and energy . . . I almost died when my aide was cut, it was so stressful trying to keep that level of programming and activity and realize I can't do the job of two people even if you have student aides I cannot do the job of two people. So I was so exhausted by the end of the day I had to change.

Participant 4 continued, "I have to ask [for help] . . . because we don't have help . . . I've had to create on my own a little network of help with a few reliable friends . . . I'm very fortunate to have a core." Participant 5 stated, "I'm very poor on this outside of our district. I kind of just gravitate to the people around me and it's probably even more so the people whose schools are in close proximity to me." He continued and stated, "There are book clubs but I'm not in it . . . I'm busy . . . you just can't do it."

For some solo middle school librarians, taking part in social capital experiences means eliminating library services to students, teachers, and the community. Participant 1 beleaguered,

Having to close down my library to be able to leave and participate is a barrier I have to overcome each time I go to participate . . . and locking the door means my students don't have access to not only books and computers, they don't have access to me. I think that's one of the biggest barriers. Maybe that goes back to me being a solo librarian. If the world could understand how school librarians impact the students maybe it wouldn't be so easy to start cutting their funds little by little.

Participant 3 said she would not collaborate with other librarians on a school day because "I wouldn't do that on the school day. I could not close the library." She

explained that without a library assistant, being away from the library on a school day is a burden:

Because we can only have a very small pool of subs . . . they have to be retired librarians basically . . . [so] I have to in advance look at the calendar for the year and call one of those few librarians and schedule them for the whole year. For the times I know when I have to be out. When I had an assistant that was never an issue because the assistant would run the library while I was gone . . . so since we lost our assistants that has been a huge burden on us to be able to get professional development . . . Heaven help if I get sick because if I ever get sick and it is last-minute then the library will be closed.

Participant 3 fondly reminisced,

I have in the past when I had an assistant . . . I would get together with one to two of the other middle school librarians and we would put together an elaborate reading promotion video . . . I haven't done that the last couple of years because it got just way too much to do [without an assistant].

Even for monthly librarian's meetings, Participant 3 said, "Because our meetings require us to travel to different campuses which can be a hindrance . . . and close the library for a couple of hours." Participant 5 reiterated, "I don't like to go for a long time because when you've been gone when you come back you never know what is going to face you when you get back. It's like gremlins have been in here." But in the end, as Participant 5 stated, "Do what's best for the kids first and then everything else will follow."

The responses of the participants were honest, thorough, and passionate. The solo middle school librarians shared confidential thoughts with me, and I assured them their

honest opinions would be protected. Themes from the interviews were collegiality, professional organizations, principal support, librarians are teachers, and isolation.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Implications and Recommendations**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate a sample of solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district as they shared their participation and experiences with librarian-to-librarian social capital. In this study, qualitative data were collected from interviews and used to organize the ideas of five solo middle school librarians. The guiding research questions I used were:

1. How do solo middle school librarians perceive social capital experiences with other solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district?
2. How do solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district perceive social capital experiences with other school librarians outside of their large Texas school district?
3. How do solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district perceive factors that influence social capital experiences?

The participation and experiences of a sample of solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district was investigated in this study. Each participant shared anecdotes regarding librarian-to-librarian social capital. I interviewed 5 solo middle school librarians face-to-face. After transcribing the 5 recorded interviews, I analyzed the data to compare the responses. Several themes were revealed from the responses and discussed in Chapter IV. These themes included collegiality, professional organizations, principal support, librarians are teachers, and isolation.

## Connection to the Literature

Several findings of the study connect to the literature, specifically: (a) isolation, (b) school librarians are teachers, (c) strong library attributes of librarian work, (d) and professional resources. Research described in the literature review of Chapter II and new research discovered as a result of analyzing the interviews, uphold found results. Works by Couros, 2015; Johnston, Markle, and Arhar, 1988; Penuel, Riel, Joshi, Pearlman, Chong Min, and Frank, 2010; Lance, 2002c; Kasar and Clark, 2000; Sinek, 2014; Lin and Erickson, 2008; and Dow, 2013 were particularly helpful to me.

Isolation was the foundation of every solo middle school librarian's comments (Chandler, 1983; Chenoweth, 2009; Costello, 1987; Davis, 1987; Dussault, et al., 1999; Elmore, 2010; Flinders, 1988; Goodlad & Klein, 1974; Levine, 1986; Lieberman & Miller, 1992, 1984; Little, 1990; Rosenholtz & Smylie, 1984; Rothberg, 1986; Zielinski & Hoy, 1983). The solo aspect of being a middle school librarian obstructed each's ability to get together with other librarians during and beyond the school day, hindered the solo middle school librarian's energy and ability to participate in professional organizations, restricted principal support, and impeded collaboration with teachers. Couros (2015) may have argued isolation became a choice in today's technological arena, yet it was a reality for the participants in this study who yearned for face-to-face social capital experiences. Strong relationships and collegiality impact the solo middle school librarian's success in schools (Johnston, Markle, & Arhar, 1988; Penuel et al., 2010). Each solo middle school librarian recognized the critical role principal support played in taking advantage of social capital experiences or remaining isolated (Leana, 2010).

Peppered throughout the participant responses were the fact solo middle school librarians are teachers. The opportunity to plan collaboratively with campus teachers and leaders is critical to a library program's success and appropriate use of resources, including access to the librarian (Lance, 2002c). All participants bemoaned the lack of time to be able to collaborate with teachers, learn from colleagues, and spend instructional time with students. Teachers need time to plan and develop student-centered lessons, and leaders need to "provide ample time for exploration and collaboration to allow new and better ideas to emerge" (Couros, 2015, p. 157). Each solo middle school librarian recognized the critical role principal support plays in their taking advantage of social capital experiences as teacher leaders (Leana, 2010).

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) defines the term effective school library as having "a certified school librarian at the helm, provides personalized learning environments, and offers equitable access to resources to ensure a well-rounded education for every student" (Habley, 2016, p. 1). These strong library attributes of librarian work were exemplified their continued quest for bettering themselves for increased student achievement. Researchers in multiple state-level studies have discovered that test scores tend to be higher for schools that have a full-time, certified school librarian, and even higher for schools with such a librarian with support staff (Achterman, 2008). In Illinois, a 2003 study asserts statistically significant relations between strong library attributes and student achievement (Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2005). Each solo middle school librarian recognized the critical role principal support plays in taking advantage of social capital experiences that affect instruction and student achievement (Leana, 2010).

Educators from several disciplines agree in the importance of participation in professional organizations to enhance professional skills (Kasar & Clark, 2000). Members of professional organizations “take care of each other” (Sinek, 2014, p. 18). The solo middle school librarians in this study each spoke of the importance of professional resources. While various roadblocks may hinder participation, including support or lack thereof from the principal (Couros, 2015; Lin & Erickson, 2009), professional organizations providing professional development opportunities are imperative for student achievement (Dow, 2013). Each solo middle school librarian recognized the critical role principal support plays in their taking advantage of social capital experiences via professional organizations (Leana, 2010).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social capital theory and human capital are the two theoretical frameworks establishing the foundation for this qualitative study, as applied to the public middle school solo librarian (Putnam, 2000). For this research study, the work of Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988), Granovetter (1973), Lin (1999), Portes (1998), and Putnam (2000) build the framework. Relationships matter in a person’s life (Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1973; Howard, 2010; Johnston, Markle, & Arhar, 1988; Leana, 2010, 2011; Leana & Pil, 2006; Lin, 1999; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Smith, 2009), and each solo middle school librarian recognized the critical role principal support plays in their taking advantage of social capital experiences (Leana, 2010).

Relationships between educators through collaboration and formal and informal learning communities become an important component of school effectiveness (Healey,

2011). The solo middle school librarians in this study highly regard their relationships with each other and the professional community. Within these relationships, the solo middle school librarians “can share expertise, observe one another’s instruction, critically examine teaching and learning, and develop collective norms and values” (Healey, 2011, p. 3). Social capital framework provides understanding of how teachers’ relationships affect their professionalism and how the relationships might relate to student achievement, and participants of this study value these relationships.

Not all participants in this study, however, absolutely value all social capital experiences. Each participant valued the 30 minutes before monthly meetings to various degrees. Each participant valued the monthly meetings to various degrees. The same was discovered true for each participant regarding the benefit of social capital experiences provided by professional organizations and social media on their professional practice. All participants agreed, however, that some form of self-imposed restrictions have been made regarding involvement in social capital experiences because each is alone on the job, which restricts their ability to have the time and stamina to engage with other solo middle school librarians.

The economical aspect of education includes human capital, which is established by changes people make that bring skills and capabilities to their work, causing people to behave in new ways (Blaug, 1970; Coleman, 1988). Leana (2010) explained that social capital and human capital, which means teacher knowledge, skills, and credentials, worked together to assist with student academic achievement. Leana argued that to improve an entire school instead of only individual teachers, both social and human capital must exist. She explained that the ideal situation of social and human capital



working together created a trusting climate, which was even more important than human capital. Each participant of this study purposely sought out relationships with other to increase their knowledge and skills to best meet the needs of learners. Each satisfied the credentials for being a certified Texas teacher and school librarian, and Participants 1, 3, and 4 surpassed those requirements.

### **Implications for Practice**

School librarianship is challenging work, and the solo school librarian must “learn to prioritize, to work smart, to strategically use their time and resources, and to take time for themselves, both personally and professionally” (Church & Reeve, 2011, p. 7). The solo school librarian may have to let go of things that may have always been, delegate or share responsibility, and focus on students first (Church & Reeve, 2011). To ensure the mandatory library areas are served, the solo school librarian must conserve resources, energy, and time by identifying high-impact tasks that provide the most value and best supports the school’s mission (Karabush & Pleviak, 2011). Lofrumento (2004) suggested the solo school librarian must always first address the tasks that directly affect student learning.

Unfortunately, no new hope for a full-time, or even part-time library assistant, is on the horizon in the Texas public school district. Allocation is a site-based decision. Therefore, the solo middle school librarian must advocate to the principal to secure a volunteer coordinator, times for other instructional paraprofessionals to work in the library, and support via dedicated librarian substitutes or library coverage when the librarian is out of the building.

### **Implications for Policy**

Leana (2010) argued that to improve an entire school, both social and human capital must exist. Pil and Leana (2009) detailed how social capital and human capital work together to increase student achievement. The researchers recommended social capital should not be underestimated and policy makers should consider requiring the fostering of social capital on campuses. Therefore, school and district policies must support human capital and social capital requirements, experiences, and opportunities. Solo middle school librarians must have the time and opportunity for social capital experiences, such as conferences, that are paid for by school leadership with designated substitutes in their absence.

In addition, Texas should provide new school library state standards, *School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines for Texas*, which are currently under consideration. I am a member of the Library Standards Metrics Committee and work with other Texas school library leaders on this initiative. My input to the committee includes standards for professional library staffing and paraprofessional library staffing. These Standards should be Texas law. Once the Standards become law, principal preparation programs will be obligated to teach future principals the critical role libraries and librarians provide in supporting student achievement.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

With the study on the social capital experiences of the solo middle school librarian, a surfeit of questions for future study emerged. Social capital touches all persons professional and personally. For this study, overriding themes of teachers and teaching, technology, various school levels, staffing, support and school size emerged.

A multitude of ideas for future study came to fruition due to the dearth of research available on topics surrounding solo librarians and social capital experiences. The first topic of interest is the phenomenon between school librarian and teacher social capital experiences. A researcher might investigate more deeply by studying the phenomenon between teacher and solo librarian or conversely, with a librarian supported by adequate staffing as recommended by the *School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines for Texas*. Another idea for further research is the need for the study of the phenomenon of technology and social capital. Historically social capital experiences have been face-to-face interactions, yet now technology's role is emerging as another platform for social capital. Third, the phenomenon of the solo school librarian may differ on the elementary and high school level. Next, the phenomenon of social capital and the properly supported by paraprofessional staff librarian would be a significant study. Fifth, because of the reduction of library support staff, have educators seen in impact on student scores or literacy attitudes? Sixth, research on how principals learn about what expertise and programming a Texas school librarian offers could be investigated. Furthermore, research investigating the social capital opportunities for rural or small school districts could occur. Eighth, social capital experiences of the non-solo librarian should be investigated. Last, because of my rare role as a central office library leader supporting campuses, the school library canon would benefit from research regarding the social capital experiences of librarians, either solo or properly staffed, with district-level support compared to no support.

## **Recommendations for School Leaders**

Relationships between educators through collaboration and formal and informal learning communities become an important component of school effectiveness (Healey, 2011). Therefore, school leaders cannot ignore the significant impact social capital can have upon educators. School leaders must provide time and resources for professional development, and they must promote opportunities to staff. Communication of this support is imperative because, “People are afraid to share what they want because they don’t know that getting it is even a possibility” (Couros, 2015, p. 132). Second, school leaders are responsible to grow more leaders (Tschannen-Moran, 2004), and should identify school librarians as instructional leaders on the campus and support their leadership development. Last, school leaders must provide adequate support staff for school librarians if instruction, leadership, and learning are to take place. With the elimination of the library assistant, the librarian and the campus library program is most impacted by fewer visits to the library by individual students, fewer information literacy skills instruction contacts, fewer books and materials checked out, and reduced administration of electronic reading programs (Smith, 2001).

Recommendations for school leaders with personnel or hiring authority should consider implementing the following to support the solo middle school librarian: (a) hire a full-time library paraprofessional; (b) limit extra-duties of the librarian and library paraprofessional; (c) expect collaboration between librarian and teachers; (d) provide time and opportunities for librarians to provide staff development to teachers and other librarians, (e) and ensure the library program is on a flexible, not fixed, schedule. If a full-time library paraprofessional is not fiscally possible, school leaders with personnel or

hiring authority should implement the following to support the solo middle school librarian: (a) limit extra-duties of the librarian; (b) ensure the library program is on a flexible, not fixed, schedule; (c) provide librarian-trained specialized substitutes for days when the librarian is away due to illness or for social capital or professional development opportunities; (d) provide paraprofessional support during the school day for shelving books and other clerical work such as organizing overdue notices and book repair; (e) assign a volunteer coordinator to facilitate a schedule of specially trained volunteers to work in the library during the busiest times of day, during the librarian's 30 minute lunch, and when the librarian collaborates with teachers or other instructional leaders, (f) expect collaboration between librarian and teachers; (g) and provide time and opportunities for librarians to provide staff development to teachers and other librarians,. These recommendations can easily be implemented without taxing other programs.

Overall, each solo middle school librarian values social capital opportunities, especially those face-to-face with colleagues within district. Without appropriate support staff of a full-time adult library assistant, opportunities for adequate social capital experiences do not exist. School districts and campuses should provide opportunities for librarian social capital by providing full-time adult library assistants and time during the school day for librarians to professionally interact with other library professionals on the district, local, and state level.

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*Educational Administration Quarterly*, 19, 27-45.

doi:10.1177/0013161X83019002003

## APPENDIX A



**Institutional Review Board**  
**Office of Research and Sponsored Programs**  
 903 Bowers Blvd, Huntsville, TX 77341-2448  
 Phone: 936.294.4875  
 Fax: 936.294.3622  
[irb@shsu.edu](mailto:irb@shsu.edu)  
[www.shsu.edu/~rgs\\_www/irb/](http://www.shsu.edu/~rgs_www/irb/)

DATE: January 27, 2016

TO: Jessica Lilly [Faculty Sponsor: George Moore]

FROM: Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: *Social Capital Experiences of Solo Middle School Librarians at a Public School District in South Texas: A Phenomenological Study [T/D]*

PROTOCOL #: 2016-01-26266

SUBMISSION TYPE: INITIAL REVIEW

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: January 27, 2016

REVIEW CATEGORY: Category 2—research involving survey/interview procedures usually has little, if any, associated risk, particularly if subject identifiers are removed from the data or specimens.

Thank you for your submission of Initial Review materials for this project. The Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

**\* What should investigators do when considering changes to an exempt study that could make it nonexempt?**

It is the PI's responsibility to consult with the IRB whenever questions arise about whether planned changes to an exempt study might make that study nonexempt human subjects research. In this case, please make available sufficient information to the IRB so it can make a correct determination.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 936-294-4875 or [irb@shsu.edu](mailto:irb@shsu.edu). Please include your project title and protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Donna Desforjes  
 IRB Chair, PHSC

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records

## APPENDIX B

Jessica Michelle Lilly (Hughes)

### *Social Capital Experiences of Solo Middle School Librarians at a Public School District in South Texas: A Phenomenological Study*

#### Research Questions

1. How do solo middle school librarians perceive social capital experiences with other solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district?
2. How do solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district perceive social capital experiences with other school librarians outside of their large Texas school district?
3. How do solo middle school librarians in a large Texas school district perceive factors that influence social capital experiences?

#### Solo Middle School Librarian Interview Questions

These questions address the opportunities that librarians have working with other middle school librarians within the district to affect librarianship and library programming.

1. Within the school district, what formal opportunities do you have to discuss, learn, or share ways to improve your professional skills and library program? Do you incorporate what you learn with your professional activities? How?
2. Within the school district, what informal opportunities do you have to discuss, learn, or share ways to improve your professional skills and library program? Do you incorporate what you learn with your professional activities? How?
3. How important to you are opportunities to discuss, learn, or share with other middle school librarians within your district?
4. What professional resources inside of your campus/district do you find the most valuable? Why?

These questions address activities and relationships outside of your campus and your school district that enhance your librarian practices and professionalism.

1. What professional organizations do you belong to that provide resources (information, advice, or material resources) that enhance the librarian practices and learning experiences in your library?

Jessica Michelle Lilly (Hughes)

2. Explain how you share with other librarians the resources you receive from professional organizations.
3. Do you incorporate what you learn with your campus and district professional activities? How?
4. How important to you is receiving professional advice and information from a professional organization?
5. What professional resources outside of your campus/district do you find the most valuable? Why?

The following questions address librarianship practices and working relationships factors that influence social capital experiences among the middle school librarians.

1. Does your principal and/or other administrative leadership on your campus support your endeavors for collaboration with other middle school solo librarians in the school district?
2. How and what do you contribute to your middle school colleagues that provides them with professional development information and learning opportunities?
3. Does your principal and/or other administrative leadership on your campus support your endeavors for collaboration with other middle school solo librarians outside of the school district?
4. How and what do you contribute to library professional organizations that provides professional development information and learning opportunities for your colleagues?
5. Do you trust your middle school colleagues to provide you with valuable professional information such as advice, material resources, and programming ideas?
6. When you share librarianship practices with other middle school librarians, do you think that they value your contribution?
7. Do you think that you can rely on your middle school colleagues to provide you with expertise and information when you are in need of assistance?

*Your participation is sincerely appreciated.  
Thank you for your commitment to education.*

## VITA

**Jessica Michelle Lilly Hughes**

### ***Educational History***

Doctorate of Educational Leadership, December, 2016  
*Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX*  
 Dissertation: Social capital experiences of solo middle school librarians at a public school district in south Texas: A phenomenological study

Master of Library Science, Sam Houston State University

Bachelor of Science, Curriculum & Instruction-English Composite, Texas A&M University-College Station, TX, cum laude

### ***Professional Licensure and Certifications***

Texas Principal Certificate, Grades EC-12, 2002-present

Texas Learning Resources Endorsement, Grades PK-12, 1994 (Life)

Texas Teacher Certificate, Secondary English Language Arts, Grades 6-12, 1990 (Life)

### ***Professional Experiences***

Lead Library Specialist, Northside ISD (San Antonio), November 2012 – present

Librarian & Substitute Assistant Principal, Arnold Middle School, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, July 2011 – November 2012

Coordinator of Library & Media Services, Cypress Fairbanks ISD, July 2002 – June 2011

Part-Time Curriculum Editor, Heinemann Publishing, 1999 – 2001

Head Librarian, Cypress Springs High School, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, 1997 – 2002

Part-Time Librarian, Houston Community College, Katy Campus, 1997 – 2001

Librarian, Horne Elementary School, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, 1994 – 1997

English Teacher, Cypress Creek High School, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, 1990 – 1994

### ***Publication***

Kuon, T, Wachsmann, M., & Lilly, J. M. (2013). *Inquiring minds want to know: Professional reading habits of school librarians*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

### ***Books***

Lilly Hughes, J. M. (2013). Resources for booktalking. In T. S. Lesesne, *Reading ladders: Leading readers from where they are to where we'd like them to be*. Submitted for publication.

Lilly Hughes, J. M. (2013). Chapter 4: Pilot study: The middle school solo librarian's participation in social capital activities. In Pickett, J. (Ed.), *Libraries for effective learning: Qualitative studies in educational leadership*. Retrieved from <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/276298>

### ***Presentations***

Lilly Hughes, J. M. (2014, April). *Acquisitions 101: Connecting with vendors*. Panel discussion at the Texas Library Association Annual Conference, San Antonio, TX.

Lilly Hughes, J. M. (2013, January). *Pilot study: The middle school solo librarian's participation in social capital activities*. Paper session presented at the meeting of Texas Council of Professors of Educational Administration Conference Within a Conference, Austin, TX.

Lilly Hughes, J. M. (2014, September). *Closing the global achievement gap: 7 survival skills in the library*. Session presented at the Library Resource Roundup-Education Service



Center 20, San Antonio, TX.

### ***Honors and Awards***

Joe Kortz Spirit Leadership Award, Spring, 2013 (Sam Houston State University)

Kappa Delta Pi, c. 1990 (Texas A&M University, College Station)

Phi Kappa Phi, c. 1990 (Texas A&M University, College Station)

### ***Professional Organizations & Committees***

#### ***National Committee***

National Council on Digital Citizenship, January 2010 – present

#### ***Professional Organizations***

American Association of School Librarians, 2002–present

American Library Association, 2002–present

ASCD & Texas ASCD, 2002–present

Texas Association of School Librarians, 1994–present

Texas Association of School Library Administrators, 2002–present

Texas Computer Education Association, 2010–present

Texas Library Association (TLA), 1994 – present

#### ***State Committees, Partial Listing***

##### ***Texas Library Association***

Annual Conference Local Arrangements Committee, Houston, 2003

Annual Conference Local Arrangements Committee, Houston, 2009

Annual Conference Local Arrangements Committee, San Antonio, 2014

Annual Conference Local Arrangements Committee, San Antonio, 2017

Executive Leadership Immersion, 2016 (inaugural)

Library Standards Metrics Committee, 2016–present

Professional Rights and Responsibilities Committee, 2005–2008

Telecommunications Committee, c. 2001

TLA District 8 Fall Conference Planning Committee, 2000

##### ***Sam Houston State University***

Library Science Advisory Council, 2013

#### ***Local Committee, Partial Listing***

Northside ISD Leadership Academy for Department Leaders, 2015–2016