

DISCOVERING THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOL LIBRARY WORK

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by

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For Nico

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## ABSTRACT

The research examines how school library work is socially organized and how social organization affects cooperation with teachers and others in the school. The researcher uses the institutional ethnography frame of inquiry, providing a way of looking at the role and function of the school librarian/ school media specialist as socially-organized and institutionally-oriented. Using ethnographic data gathering techniques of interviews, participant-observation, and textual analysis in a middle school in the Midwestern United States, the researcher describes social organization of school library work in the categories of collaboration, technology, and access. Viewing school library work through the institutional ethnography frame of reference reveals how powerless media specialists and teachers can be—how the structures that are supposed to make the non-instructional and disciplinary parts of their work easier consume their time and affect their interactions with students.

In an apparently uncertain economic climate, where libraries face closure due to state, city, and school district budget problems the existence of a library in the school becomes even more vital, both to provide access to information to young people and to keep the ideal of the library present in their experience. The visibility of the library and the librarian is also vital. People who make decisions about funding need to know who the librarian is and what he or she contributes. Institutional ethnography shows people where the work is, especially the work that is not recognized in the official institutional discourse. With the knowledge of how the work is shaped, school librarians can get a

clearer view of how to work within the institution to achieve the goals of librarianship:  
providing physical and intellectual access to information.

# Chapter 1 Problematizing School Library Work

## (Introduction and Rationale)

### Introduction

School libraries and school librarians help children learn how to access, evaluate, manipulate, and create information, along with giving children an experiential model of what a library is supposed to be. For many young people, the school media center is the only library to which they have regular access. In addition to its potential importance in literacy, the media center as an institution plays a role in shaping a young person's perspective and understanding of what a library is. The media center can shape young people's expectations of library services and of their rights to access information. The school librarian (media specialist) can shape a young person's understanding of what to expect from a librarian. These young people will soon become adults—parents, workers, politicians, and taxpayers—making important decisions about education and school libraries and they will take with them what they learned in school. It has been acknowledged that administrators base their perceptions and expectations for library media specialists on previous experiences as administrators, teachers, and even students (Alexander, Smith, & Carey, 2003; Church, 2008; Hartzell, 2002; Neuman, 2003)

The library as an institution is in trouble. At the time of this writing, the state of Pennsylvania and the city of Philadelphia were threatening to close all public libraries in Philadelphia to save money (Greenwood, 2009). As other cities and states face budget crises, managers look to public, school, and university libraries as a place to cut budgets

(Eberhart, 2008; Flagg, 2009; Goldberg & Eberhart, 2007; Kniffel & Bailey Jr, 2009; Oder, Blumenstein, Fialkoff, Hadro, & Lau-Whelan, 2009; Oder, Blumenstein, & Hadro, 2009; “Trenton Library,” 2008). School districts cut certified librarian positions (Ewbank, 2008). Librarians who are fortunate enough to keep their jobs often split their work week between two or more school buildings. Some districts have clerks or parents with no library training running the media center (Barack, 2005).

These are distressing developments for those who believe the library is a public good and that access to library services and materials help people develop literacy skills that are important for having a voice in civic society. Access to library services and materials means more than merely being able to go into a room full of books and check some out. Access to library services and materials includes having access to a librarian's skills and knowledge about finding, organizing, and evaluating information, having a developmentally appropriate materials collection organized in a logical and consistent way that facilitates information retrieval, and having a physical space for studying and exploring new ideas. In a school setting, this also includes having a collection that supports the school's curriculum. The library, public or school, can help level the playing field for people who cannot afford to buy their own materials and it can broaden the horizons of those who can. Literacy researchers and teachers such as Stephen Krashen and Kelly Gallagher emphasize the importance of “free voluntary reading” and a print-rich environment for increasing literacy (Krashen, 2004, p. 1). The school media center might be the only large collection of books a young person has regular access to, so it plays a key role in providing access to information (Krashen, 2004).

With a school librarian's expertise in collection development and pedagogical knowledge, the school library should be a much more recognized resource for literacy efforts. As of a 2006 School Library Journal survey (Thomas, 2006), 24 states required the school librarian to be a certified teacher, while seven also required classroom teaching experience. Even so, the school librarian is often not seen as a literacy resource in the school (Sen, Burns, & Miller, 2009).

Library and school library advocates look for ways to enhance the position of the library in education, but knowledge of school library work tends to come from a prescriptive and normative stance, rather than a standpoint of understanding what school librarians do. The published literature enthusiastically prescribes a specific collaborative role for the school librarian without taking into account the culture of the school and of education and without taking into account much of the daily work of the school librarian.

Earlier in this decade, Neuman asserted that the key research questions in contemporary school librarianship relate more to how students use electronic resources and how effective standards are (2003), but those questions gloss over elements of school library work that have unintended and unexamined effects. Those questions assume students have unimpeded access to the media center and to contemporary technology. Factors that affect school library work affect student access to materials and information.

The role of a school librarian is a topic of much interest in school library literature. As discussed in Chapter Two, the role as represented in the literature appears different from the role observed in individual media centers. Much of the best-known research comes from outside the daily lived experiences of librarians. Researchers are either no longer in the media center on a regular basis or never have been media

specialists. The research is carried out from a distance and observations focus on specific phenomena, such as students' use of databases (Hirsh, 1999). These types of research contribute valuable information to the field, but the knowledge contributed misses some important aspects of how the actual work life of school librarians is shaped.

Practicing school librarians tend to publish in sources intended for practitioners and they tend to write about specific ways they can help or have helped students “achieve” in school, as defined by test scores and grades. Educators, perhaps by necessity, have accepted an institutional definition of student achievement that focuses relentlessly on a single measurement of a single year, in fact, student performance over a single testing period. This definition of achievement objectifies students and punishes teachers, while ignoring the long-term effects of education and literacy (Cobb & McClain, 2006; McGhee & Nelson, 2005).

A note on terminology: Professionals in librarianship debate often about titles, sometimes preferring to avoid the word librarian. I view the school library as a *library* and the MLS degreed person who runs the school library as a *librarian*. Therefore, during the first three chapters, when I am referring to school library work and the work of school librarians, I use those terms. However, many professionals in the United States prefer to be known as library media specialists or media specialists, and the school library is usually referred to as the media center. At the location of my research, the physical space is called the media center and the person who manages it is generally referred to as the media specialist. Therefore, when I refer to her and to her work, I use the term media specialist and media center.

## **The problematic**

This research uses the institutional ethnography frame of inquiry developed by Dorothy Smith, and examines how daily work is governed by the work of others in a way that can be invisible. In institutional ethnography, “[t]he concept of problematic is used to relate the sociologist and the sociological inquiry to the experience of members of a society as knowers located in actual lived situations in a new way” (Smith, 1987, p. 91). The concept of problematic keeps the study in the “social organization of the everyday world” (Smith, 1987, p. 91). Traditional sociological studies treat the object of study as if it can be removed from the everyday world and studied in a Petri dish, no longer subject to influences from the larger world. In school library research, this can be seen in studies that isolate one part of a school librarian’s work (such as collaboration), examine it, and draw conclusions: that school librarians must “show leadership” in creating a collaborative culture in school (Lance, 2002), as if the librarian is not subject to ruling relations or social organization of work in the school.

### **The problematic: How is school library work socially organized?**

The problematic emerged over a period of years as I compared what I was reading in published school library research with what I was experiencing while working in school libraries. My question came from my assumptions about the importance of the school library or media center in developing literacy in young people. Surveys and *hard research* can add useful information to the field of school library research, but they cannot substitute for an understanding of the work of an embodied school librarian. These studies do not and cannot acknowledge the barriers for students, teachers, and school librarians created by unacknowledged relations of ruling. These studies provide

useful points of view, but without looking at the invisible forces shaping school librarianship, they can only tell a tiny part of the story.

At the same time, personal anecdotes have limitations in explicating ruling relations, the set of social relations that govern and shape daily work. An institutional ethnography goes beyond the personal anecdote and starts from the embodied experience of the situated knower, exploring from that standpoint to discover how the ruling relations are organized. An institutional ethnography from one person's standpoint cannot be described as "generalizable," but the method of inquiry can be used in a reader's own situation to understand the ruling relations governing his or her work. While an ethnography such as this one is a critique of the effect of ruling relations on school library work, it is not a critique of the individuals working within this system.

The work of the school librarian is also coordinated by the community, by parental interaction, by tax decisions, and by school board decisions. Taxes are a big issue in education. Although researchers often look at educational issues as if they are divorced from any kind of local culture and community, people who have lived in areas where educational tax increases have been voted for or voted against know that issues of district and community culture play a big role in how much a community is willing to pay. The school library can play a role in shaping the community culture, but the community also plays a role in shaping the school library.

School library work is coordinated across multiple institutions. The work takes place at an intersection of librarianship and education. Exactly where the library is located in this intersection depends on many factors, including the librarian's background and education. Tensions exist between work connected with managing the collection and

promoting reading and work connected to teaching and managing students. Tensions exist between providing curriculum support for teachers and providing leisure reading for students. These tensions might come from the different institutions exerting ruling pressure on the school librarian's work.

Some examples of how the work of the school librarian is coordinated include techniques put into place to control and manage large groups of people, scheduling decisions, and an understanding of the work of the librarian as including making decisions for children about appropriate reading materials.

## **Techniques for Managing Students**

Part of the work in a group education environment for minors includes keeping track of the physical location of each student. Most public schools in the United States require students to have permission to be in the halls. This permission is often represented by a page in the student's planner, an official printed form, a random scrap of paper, or even a toy, such as a large plastic dinosaur. These items are expected to represent the authority of the teacher and control the student's behavior in the hall (Commanday, 1994). The hall pass system functions as a kind of surveillance of students, an attempt to “induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1995, p. 201). The necessity of these devices is taken for granted to the extent that very little research has been done on the effect or the effectiveness of hall pass policies.

The hall pass system leads to library staff being required to enforce the surveillance system. That leads to the first interaction with a student being some form of “where’s your pass,” “where should you be right now?” or “remember to sign in.” The

ruling practices must be enforced without conscious attention to the effect on the student's view of the actual school library or of libraries in general. Attempts to examine or critique these systems of surveillance are met with questions about how such large groups of students could be controlled without structures like hall passes. Because of the way schools are arranged and designed, a very real issue educators face is *controlling* students and asserting authority.

Other techniques used to manage large groups of students include positive behavior support (PBS) systems, originally designed to improve the behavior of students with mental or emotional challenges in the school environment (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006; Sugai & Horner, 2002). These systems involve constant monitoring of behavior and reinforcement of desired behavior. These systems also encourage the use of tokens that students can collect from adults for exhibiting desired behaviors. Like the hall pass system, PBS systems introduce a layer of prescribed interaction between adults in the institution and the students and function as another layer of surveillance. These practices can reduce the student to an object, a potential delinquent whose behavior is only controlled by an item representing the authority of an adult in the institution.

## **Scheduling**

Scheduling decisions also affect the work of the school librarian in dramatic ways. Questions about negotiating scheduling decisions come up frequently in conversations among school librarians in person and on email lists, but the impact of school-wide or district-wide scheduling decisions is rarely addressed in school library research, except in practitioner-focused articles evangelizing for a certain kind of scheduling. The two main types of library scheduling are *fixed* scheduling and *flexible* scheduling. With a fixed

schedule, classes come into the library at a specific time. Sometimes those classes meet in the library daily, sometimes weekly, sometimes every two weeks. With flexible scheduling, classes come into the library as the teacher determines a need for library-based instruction.

There have been problems with both ways of managing library time. With fixed scheduling, some teachers began viewing library time as a sort of *teacher release time*, meaning teachers are not in the library with the students. Librarians also felt that the library time was being taken for granted and that they would prefer to teach library lessons in context, connected with content lessons. With flexible scheduling, a potential problem is that some teachers would not bring their students to the library at all because the time would be taken by other required teaching.

Beyond these issues, examining the way library time is scheduled is one way to discover where the library fits into the institution of the school. Scheduling is an area where institutional relations can be made explicit. Exactly what the scheduling says about the school culture is likely unique to each school.

### **Collection Development and “Reading Promotion”**

Another way the work of the librarian is coordinated is in the expectation that the librarian will act as a gate-keeper, judging on behalf of individual students which books they should read. In some cases, this is evident when librarians agree to sort their library by devices like Lexile reading levels or grade levels. By using these systems to arrange their collections, librarians can end up enforcing the construct of “reading levels”, using standards determined elsewhere.

While an important role of the librarian is to help patrons find books, taking on the role of denying a book because it is *too easy* or *too hard* for the student transmits ideas to the students about what reading *should* be like and about how librarians will react to personal reading choices. Gramsci (1988) states, “Literacy is not a need and it therefore becomes a torment, something imposed by the wielders of power” (p. 67). When children do not have ownership over their reading choices, they are rendered powerless. Their library use becomes extrinsically motivated, dependent on school requirements, so their library use dwindles each year as it becomes less and less required in higher grades.

The amount of power children have over their reading choices is determined by multiple ruling relations. Some school librarians are able to resist pressure to prescribe reading, while others believe they are doing the best thing for the child. While some of those relations can be made visible in school library work, others exist outside the school.

Collection development decisions can be driven not just by reading levels, but by initiatives intended to improve certain aspects of children’s reading. Some of those initiatives include Reading Counts and Accelerated Reader, commercial programs that assign books an immutable reading level and that provide quizzes to *prove* students have read and *comprehended* the books. The definition of comprehension appears to relate more to the child’s ability to remember facts about the plot, rather than the child’s understanding of the ideas or concepts presented. Schools might not buy books that are NOT included within these programs, yet the processes by which books are chosen for inclusion are not transparent. Someone is choosing which books children should read and excluding other books, but their authority is assumed and not examined. While this

is currently an issue in elementary school libraries, middle schools and high schools are not immune from programs like these.

Systems that use these programs are invested in the perceived success of the programs. The scores on the quizzes are seen as rewards and are often further reinforced with rewards for accumulating high scores. The reward for reading shifts from an intrinsic enjoyment of reading to an extrinsic push for prizes and recognition.

One area of reading promotion that working librarians stay active in is book awards. Librarians are responsible for choosing many national book award winners, including the prestigious Newbery award for “the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children” (ALA 2009, np.). Librarians also select state-level award books, some of which invite the participation and votes of students. Teachers and parents seem to feel obligated to assign these books to students and librarians are obligated to collect the books the parents and teachers want the students to read. These books can take a large proportion of a small collection development budget, especially in the case of state book awards that require students to read a certain number of books in order to be eligible to vote for the winner. Awards become institutions that shape the collection management decisions of librarians and the reading behavior of students.

While these examples can be evidence of ruling relations at play, what is not clear is how activities like this become part of the socially organized work of the librarian. While it would be impossible in the scope of this research to untangle the history of power involved in reading reward and book award systems, it can be possible to look at less ubiquitous elements of school library work to try to determine how institutions become established.

## **Summary**

There is a gap in school library media literature in research based in an authentic school culture and grounded in the experience of librarians, teachers, and administrators. While the power of the aggregated librarian to advocate for the aggregated library is overstated, there seems to be little focus on how individual librarians can better understand their school's power structures and work within those structures to advocate for student and faculty use of the library media center.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **Revisiting the Problematic**

This chapter reviews literature related to the institutional ethnography frame of inquiry. This chapter also reviews literature related to school library work in a contemporary context. Because the school library media center is governed by its position in a school, this chapter also looks at research and writing about schools, particularly in the areas of technology and collaboration. The literature reviewed begins to paint a picture of how some ruling relations developed and are transmitted in school library work.

### **Institutional Ethnography**

Dorothy Smith developed institutional ethnography in the 1980s to address issues of social organization that she did not see in traditional sociology. Unlike other forms of sociological inquiry, institutional ethnography is expected to continue to grow and change as scholars use it to answer questions about why things happen the way they do (DeVault, 2006). The method uses traditional sociological methods, including observation, participant-observation, interviews, and textual analysis, and acknowledges researcher experience and reflection as acceptable forms of data (Campbell, 1998; DeVault, 2000). An institutional ethnography remains subjective and does not try to obscure the researchers' or participants' voices under a veil of perceived objectivity. Experience is a point of entry into examining the way work is socially organized.

## Previous Institutional Ethnography Studies

Institutional ethnography has been used to explicate the ruling relations surrounding the work of health care workers, AIDS patients, surveillance camera operators, social workers, people under investigation, mothers, librarians, and young library patrons. Parada, Barnoff, and Coleman (2007) used the institutional ethnography frame of inquiry to examine how social workers make decisions about child welfare after an attempt to make the system more structured in Ontario and discovered how social workers were continuing to use their autonomy and professional agency, especially as they gained more experience working within the system. On the other side of the system, Brown (2006) examined the role and work of mothers being investigated by child welfare workers in British Columbia. She discovered how the system can organize actions by mothers that can then be used against them and recommended more awareness of the work mothers under suspicion do to try to achieve the system's goal of keeping children safe. Quinlan (2009) examined the "knowledge work" of health care teams in Saskatchewan and confirmed the importance of "social, communicative aspects of the knowledge processes," (p. 625) while broadening the view of knowledge creation as social work, rather than an individual process. In librarianship, McKenzie and Stooke (2007) used the method to examine the work of young children in producing story-time at a public library. Stooke (2005) has also used the method to analyze the way literacy teaching is constructed by schools and how the construction can undermine the work of parents. Griffith and Smith (2005) examined how school shapes the educational work of middle-class mothers "*in relation to the educational work of teachers and administrators*" (emphasis in the original) (p. 125) and how the work contributes "to the differentiation of the middle-class child's educational experience" (p.127) and reproduces

advantages for middle-class children. Inspired by earlier research by Griffith and Smith, Reay (1998) focused on two North London primary schools to examine the role of social class in “the maintenance of educational differences and the reproduction of social inequality” (p. 1).

## **Methods in school library research**

School library literature is explicitly normative. Authors transmit idealized pictures of school libraries and teacher-librarian interaction in their articles. The perpetuation of these idealized libraries becomes a form of ruling relation in the work of school librarians, transmitted through professional literature, conferences, mailing lists, and library education. Writers in school librarianship have specific visions of the role and place of the school library. These visions emerge from the researchers’ own standpoints and understandings of acceptable research and work practices.

## **Proper Research**

Perspectives about proper research are embedded in school library research, with an emphasis on objective research. There appears to be a preference for survey data measured with quantitative methods, as in Montiel-Overall’s (2007) research on four factors of collaboration. Montiel-Overall notes a gap in research about collaboration:

However, little is known about how collaboration between teachers and librarians occurs, what practices are involved in collaborative endeavors, and how teacher and librarian collaboration is facilitated and/or inhibited. While there is much anecdotal evidence regarding successful teacher and librarian collaboration, there is little hard research that defines specific practices

leading to successful collaboration (p. 278).

An assumption built into this article and reflected in this quote is that there exists a specific set of practices that, when carried out, will lead to successful collaboration and that these practices can be discovered through “hard research”, which Montiel-Overall (2009) defines as an “objective measure of teacher and librarian collaboration” (p. 182). Someone viewing collaboration from the standpoint of the teacher or the librarian might argue that collaboration cannot be objectified. Certainly, collaboration cannot be removed from the broader context of the school institution and examined as if it exists independently. Institutional ethnography can be used as a frame of inquiry for understanding how collaboration occurs or why it does not occur.

A common question in school library research is “What are the roles of the school library media specialist?” Neuman notes questions about roles come up every time education shifts its priorities (Neuman, 2003). Contemporary norms of the institution of education make up part of the ruling relations shaping the ideological construct. The focus on the school librarian as a leader, collaborator, instructional partner, or coordinator appears to be at the expense of the school librarian as a librarian. Using a subjective methodology from the standpoint of a person in the school to examine these institutional forces can give school librarians a place to start when advocating for student access to libraries.

## **The profession of librarianship**

The profession of librarianship is not as influential in school library media research as one might expect given the close relationship assumed between school library

work and public library youth services work. The library work of the school librarian related to the collection—selecting and organizing materials—is glossed over in much of the literature about school librarianship (Church, 2008; Hartzell, 1997; Lance, 2002c). It is revealing that a 1956 article gives training in cataloging and classification equal weight with training in creating displays in recommendations for teacher education for instructional materials (Shores, 1956), showing a lack of understanding of the intellectual work that goes into managing an effective library media collection .

The literature of school librarianship focuses intensely on the instructional and collaborative roles of the school librarian, along with the school librarian's role in teaching *information literacy*. This focus becomes more understandable when it becomes clear how many researchers came to school library research from the field of education. The assumption appears to be that best practices require a library media specialist with a classroom teaching background. This assumption informs the research and recommendations for *proper credentials*, yet this bias is not made explicit in the research articles that attempt to embed themselves in ruling practices.

Much of the research done on school libraries appears to be along the lines of “how do we strengthen our position in the school and the community,” rather than “why do we do what we do?” or even “what do we do?” This focus might be because there is a belief that there is neither the time nor the money available for school librarians to examine the assumptions that guide their work or the effect those assumptions have on children. This focus might also recognize that without a strong position in the school and community, school libraries and school librarians are vulnerable to budget cuts.

## Language of Ruling

The literature of school library media research has adopted some of the language of ruling described earlier. Todd and Kuhlthau examine *effective* library programs, but leave out the power structures and assumptions embedded in the idea of effectiveness (Todd & Kuhlthau, 2005) Morris and Packard (2007) surveyed principals at schools with "exemplary" library media programs, defining exemplary to mean how well the programs match the American Association of School Librarian's current standards, which are both a product of ruling relations within the American Library Association and a product of many of the same researchers and writers discussed here. The primary perspective presented about power relations seems to overstate the power of the principal and the librarian, and understate the power of teachers, the community, and others. Power structures and power relations affect the work of the school librarian in ways that are not made explicit in the literature about and for school librarians. A key element in the literature is the perception of the intra-school power structure with the principal at the top and the library media specialist dependent on the principal's advocacy. A common theme regarding the principal in school library literature appears to be that if principals understood how effective school librarians could be, they would promote the library more and provide more time and money for school libraries. For example, Neuman (2003) states:

Politically, until research yields compelling— and widespread—evidence of the nature and extent of library media programs' contributions to measurable student achievement—and until administrators and other decision-makers are convinced to pay attention to that evidence—library media programs' status

in the schools will be marginal, even tenuous (p. 505).

The power and influence of the principal is overstated at times. Direct quotes from principals contradict the idea that the principal is the most powerful person in the school when it comes to the school library: "Regarding the lack of up-to-date computer skills, one respondent described the library media specialist as 'a librarian who runs an organized library where students check out books and are read to. . . . We are waiting for her to retire (next year) so that we can get someone who is truly a media specialist'" (Church, 2008, np.). This principal is clearly dissatisfied with this school librarian, but must wait until she is ready to leave before the principal can choose a "media specialist."

There are relations at play here that are glossed over in the literature about principal support or influence on school libraries. For example, what does this principal envision when thinking of a "media specialist?" Where does this principal get this vision of the "media specialist?" Is this ideal "media specialist" going to take on the AASL-prescribed roles? Will that person still carry out the "library" roles in the media center? Church (2008) asserts that the relationship between the principal and the school library media program is key to the program's effectiveness. While a principal's understanding of school library work is important in helping to create a school climate of instructional collaboration, other factors, or institutional forces, affect principals' decisions, such as budgets and scheduling decisions. Though principals have some control over the library budget, certain power structures have led that to be so. Some district administrators exercise a tighter control over the schools in the district than others. In some districts, library purchasing is done mainly at a district level, not the building level, thus lessening

the principal's influence over the library budget and the librarian's control over the collection, since the librarian is not the one choosing the materials.

## **Proper Licensing and Credentialing**

"Professionally trained and credentialed" and similar phrases are educational short-hand reflecting ruling practices embedded in education and librarianship. Several researchers emphasize the need for school librarians to be seen as teachers, but perhaps this need is overstated or simply assumed. The profession of librarianship includes a teaching component, but there is more to the work of the school librarian than direct instruction with students.

The perspective regarding proper qualifications for school librarians centers on gaining respect and power for the librarian. An assumption appears to be that the way for the media specialist to gain power and respect in a school environment is to assume a role in classroom teaching and curriculum development. Another assumption is that classroom teaching experience "assures administrators that you're familiar with the educational workplace" (Thomas, 2006 p. 58). Earlier writing about school librarianship linked teacher and student use of the library to the librarian's status as a teacher. "A new requirement of the librarian in educational institutions is that he should qualify as a teaching colleague so as to foster extensive and intensive use of books" (Kuhlman, 1938 p. 72 ).

Church (2008) applauds Virginia's requirement of teacher licensing for media specialists as "recognizing the teaching role of the school library media specialist" (np.). Todd and Kuhlthau (2005b), both former classroom teachers, also focus on credentials. They claim that "[p]art of creating effective school libraries is a credentialed school

librarian who has the pedagogical background to engage in shared instructional initiatives to help students learn and achieve" (p. 109). They do not explicate what they mean by "credential" and "pedagogical background." They ignore the possibility that teaching can be done by those who do not follow a specific path to the school library and they ignore the teaching work of other librarians. The assumed path in the U.S. and the required path in other countries, like Canada, is for a school librarian to go through a traditional bachelor's degree program focusing on gaining a teacher's license, to teach in a classroom for a number of years, then to move into the school library. The preferred path implies that the work of the school librarian should be very similar to the work of a classroom teacher. This path is preferred over that of a person who focuses specifically on the unique role of the school librarian.

## **Specific issues**

### ***Technology***

The effect of information technology (IT) in shaping the work of the school librarian is pervasive but not critically examined in the literature. Todd and Kuhlthau (2005b) assert that "...the provision of a strong informational infrastructure, centering on diverse sources in multiple formats targeted to learning levels, learning styles, and interest levels, and a backbone of state-of-the-art information technology are fundamental" (p. 109), yet the reality of IT issues work a bit differently. IT issues are governed by various ruling practices, including efforts by librarians in the 1960s and 1970s to take more control of audio-visual and later digital learning technologies. IT issues are also governed by concerns about inappropriate computer use by students, leading to intensive firewalls and blocking of content at a district level, with no in-

building ability to overcome blocks or provide more than a very basic level of computer support. A push to standardize all equipment across districts or even across states further strips the librarian of any power. This is a “ruling relation” at work in which a librarian performs clerical functions—inventory and light technical support—while lacking real agency and decision-making power when dealing with technology.

### ***Collaboration***

School library media researchers are very interested in the issue of collaboration. Researchers use the word collaboration in a normative sense, as short-hand for an idealized librarian-teacher relationship (Montiel-Overall, 2008; Lance, 2002). The focus on collaboration implies an assumption that collaboration can be plucked out of the context of the school and the lived experiences of the librarian and teachers and studied in a meaningful way. Resistance to collaboration is dismissed as a result of a lack of education. The same stance and assumptions are seen in Lance’s writing. “Library media specialists should be recognized and utilized by principals and teachers as professional colleagues in the teaching and learning enterprise. Where such recognition and the collaboration to which it leads do not exist, the LMS must exercise some leadership in changing the environment” (Lance, 2002, p. 6). This statement implies that librarians have not been exercising leadership and that changing the environment would be relatively easy. What would changing the environment entail? Do library researchers have an understanding of the ruling relations and the institutions that the librarian must respond to and negotiate with in the daily work? Montiel-Overall’s (2008) research into collaboration between teachers and librarians seems to begin with the assumption that all school libraries and school librarians involved are cooperative and prepared. She asks no

questions about why a teacher might bypass a librarian or prefer a classroom collection. Understanding what barriers might exist for classroom teachers would be useful.

As mentioned before, classroom teachers have not been involved in developing idealized models of school library work. Their needs and preferences have been assumed or imposed in the standards for school librarianship. Todd and Kuhlthau (2005) point out the exclusion of the classroom teacher in assumptions about the role of a school librarian:

Contemporary school librarianship literature is based on the assumption that there should be a strong and positive collaborative relationship with classroom teachers, with mutual planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of instructional interventions to ensure that students develop the appropriate cognitive, behavioral, and affective scaffolds for finding and using information in their learning tasks. Whether this role is actually endorsed by classroom teachers has never been determined (p. 90).

There appears to be a belief that one way to promote this role to classroom teachers is by hiring media specialists who are former classroom teachers.

### ***Standardized Testing***

People who work in education face intense challenges, including working in the current environment of high-stakes assessments (Conley & Glasman, 2008; McGhee & Nelson, 2005). The quality of education in the U.S. is a key concern of lawmakers, corporations, and educators. Many powerful policy makers believe the only way to assure a good education for students is through data-driven decision-making and

research-based programs. The contributions of educators who are not directly assessed by high-stakes testing, such as librarians, might be overlooked in a testing-focused environment (Cleveland, 2007), but the work of those educators is shaped and mediated by ruling practices focused on school quality and accountability.

Tests are the key way that educational reforms are currently assessed. However, these tests are far more than *neutral* and *objective* assessments of educational technique. These tests drive curriculum decisions, funding decisions, and public perception of school quality. The stakes of these tests include sanctions for schools that fail to meet certain criteria, including adequate yearly progress (AYP). These tests have other high stakes. They can affect the working environment for teachers and their education colleagues (Conley & Glasman, 2008; Granger, 2008; McGhee & Nelson, 2005). They can create anxiety and stress in students. They can also shape and organize the work of the school librarian.

In an environment where, some believe, that which does not get tested does not get done (Johnson, 2007), educators who are not seen as directly contributing to higher test scores are in danger of being overlooked (Cleveland, 2007). Teachers, anxious to increase their perceived teaching effectiveness as measured by standardized tests, might jealously guard their time with students. Administrators might look at non-testable classes like art or music as being a waste of valuable test preparation time. School district superintendents' jobs are at risk if students do not make adequate yearly progress. If a school district is seen as failing for too many school years in a row, the district faces a state takeover of the district. The superintendent would certainly be replaced. Districts that are failing also run the risk of losing good teachers. Teachers who get frustrated with

being blamed for learning problems beyond their control might decide to go to school districts where it might be easier to be successful as measured by high-stakes tests.

The stakes are high for everyone at the building level of a school system, both on a professional level and on a personal level. Students might transfer away because the school is perceived as low-performing. This means the school would lose money that is based on attendance headcounts. In many cases, students who have the financial means to change schools will also be the ones likely to score more highly on the tests, making their loss a double blow to the school. In some cases, teacher pay and bonuses are directly tied to making AYP as measured by assessment tests. The teacher's professional identity is also tied up in the perception of one's self as a competent teacher (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Rex & Nelson, 2004). Teachers are expected by society to take personal responsibility for their students' performance on standardized tests, regardless of the appropriateness of those tests for the students or the true reliability and validity of those tests. If a test says a teacher's students are failing, the teacher will be blamed. With tests driving curricular decisions, teachers feel tension between personal accountability and institutional accountability, between preparing students for tests and teaching the things teachers believe they ethically need to teach (Rex & Nelson, 2004).

While school librarians are not being measured by high-stakes testing, the stakes are still high. High-stakes testing has the potential of changing the environment of a school (Booher-Jennings, 2005). Schools that face financial sanctions for poor test scores have to make tough decisions about where to spend the limited money they do have. Schools with adequate test scores do not risk sanctions and can spend money on items that are not perceived as directly improving reading and math scores, such as libraries.

School librarian jobs can be vulnerable if those who make hiring decisions are not aware of what a school librarian does for a school.

Although the school librarian is not directly assessed by high-stakes tests, these tests do shape the work life of school librarians in multiple ways. High-stakes testing affects the work environment and the relationship the librarian has with teachers. High-stakes testing affects curricular decisions at multiple levels, thus affecting collection development within the library. High-stakes testing shapes teachers' communication with parents and students. High-stakes testing also affects the work environment and the relationship the librarian has with teachers. School librarians already struggle with questions about whether they are teachers, whether they are valuable colleagues in the work place, and what exactly their role should be. If the pressure on teachers leads to the negative environments described in several studies (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Cobb & McClain, 2006; Kohn, 2001), the perception of the librarian as a colleague can suffer. A school librarian can offer a great deal of help and support in exactly the focus area of the tests, but in an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, and mistrust, a teacher might be much less willing to reach out.

Testing drives curriculum change (with some test companies also producing curriculum.) While student assessment and evaluation should be aligned with curriculum, it appears that schools are instead aligning their curriculum with tests imposed by the state or federal government. Since a main function of the school library is to provide support for the curriculum, the collection must change to accommodate the new curriculum. If the budget is limited, collection development efforts driven by test-driven curriculum changes could mean less money for materials to support students'

leisure reading. The quantitative data preferred for assessing education does not allow for recognition of the benefits of leisure reading for students, so this type of collection development loses out.

### *Access*

Media specialists, administrators, and researchers have asked about whether school librarians create a media center environment that encourages intellectual access, but they do not ask about whether school itself creates barriers to student access to information (Bush, 2003; Carefoot, 2003). The American Association of School Librarians focuses on intellectual access to materials in its Information Power handbook, but states that “[p]hysical access is prerequisite to intellectual access” (AASL, 1998, p. 86). The organizational structures of the media center and the institution of education can undermine student access to information. The social organization of school library work related to the movement and tracking of students in the school creates interactions between library workers and students that might limit media center use.

### **Research about school**

Work in education provides certain benefits, including relatively regular hours, weekends and holidays off, and lengthy vacations compared to the average American worker (Lortie, 1975). The physical work environment itself tends to be climate-controlled, with few extremes of temperature and very little exposure to extreme weather conditions. It is a work environment that can seem familiar to most people, since most people have experience being students in schools. Education work also provides easier entry than other professions (Lortie, 1975). It is a profession often chosen by teenagers

in their first or second year of college. They can find themselves in a classroom just weeks after graduating from college with a bachelor of arts in education.

Schools tend to have a cellular organization (Lortie, 1975). Teachers are isolated in their cell with their students. Within the structure of the curriculum, they can make quite a few autonomous decisions. They also do not have many opportunities to collaborate. Even in a “team” environment, with collaboration periods, the teaching part of the work is carried out in isolation from other teachers. Issues related to standardized high-stakes assessment, cellular structures, isolationism, and individualism affect the work of the media specialist.

A school is a work place for adults who are facing all of these challenges, but school is also a work place for children. It is a place where people from a variety of classes and backgrounds spend seven to eight hours a day together. Generally, students are assigned to schools based on where they live, which is a function of their parents' income and social status. Grade levels are assigned by age. Children face tremendous pressure in their work days, including pressure to fit in, pressure to get good grades, pressure to score well on standardized tests, and pressure to decide what they want to do with their lives. Recognition of this pressure is one reason why some media specialists promote the view of the media center as a “safe haven” (Bush, 2003 p. 438).

Much of the school library research is written from a standpoint of ruling. Often, the role power relations play in shaping the work of the school librarian are dismissed, perhaps because the researchers come from a ruling standpoint. A recurring theme in school library literature is the idea of the school librarian as a "leader" in the school. However, this theme is presented as if the librarian is working in a context-free and

culture-free environment. “School library media advocates have long struggled to integrate school library media programs into schools' instructional process. The literature suggests that they have been slow to adopt those responsibilities” (Drake, 2007, p. 1). This statement is disturbing in its dismissal of institutional forces that might affect how well a school librarian can push for changes or that might affect how quickly instructional processes can be changed. This statement also shows an assumption of agency on the part of the school librarian that simply might not exist in an actual school environment, and it shows an assumption of adequacy of the standards and agreement to those standards by the librarian. This statement shows a gap between school librarians and school library media advocates. Are the advocates pushing for something that working school librarians want or are they trying to prescribe a certain way of being that might not work in the actual world of the school librarian?

## **Conclusion**

Current research in school librarianship aggregates participants into anonymous numbers. This practice, while seeking generalizability, leaves out details of HOW ruling relations and ruling practices shape the work. Researchers criticize school librarians for being slow to adapt to technology and collaboration responsibilities, without examining the institutions the librarians are trying to negotiate. Researchers stop short in investigating whether students truly have access to school libraries. A well-stocked collection and a properly trained and credentialed media specialist appear to be satisfactory, yet neither of those elements will ease a student's access if the institution has barriers in place. The institutional ethnography frame of inquiry can make visible how school library work is shaped.

## **Chapter 3 Frame of Inquiry, Methods, Methodology**

### **Problem Statement**

School library work is both taken for granted and invisible. There is a gap in school library research that is based in a real school culture and grounded in the everyday experience of school workers. There is little to explain how the work can be socially organized to discourage student and teacher use of library resources. There seems to be little focus on how individual librarians can better understand their school's power structures and work within those structures to advocate for student and faculty use of the library media center. The institutional ethnography frame of inquiry can make the power structures visible and give a school librarian a map for strengthening the school library program for the benefit of students and teachers.

I went into the research focusing on reading, literacy, and the idea of the library as a safe haven for students, but found that the daily work is located elsewhere. Technology played a larger role in the daily work than I expected, and so did the daily management of students' bodies—managing traffic patterns and verifying hall passes.

### **Researcher's Standpoint**

The school library is the place where young people learn about libraries. The school library is often the only library a young person to which a young person has regular access. Access to a wide variety of reading materials improves literacy and improves other aspects of a person's life which might not be easy to examine. I became interested in the subject of the teacher-librarian's place within various institutions as I worked on my Master of Arts in Library Science with concurrent school media

certification. I did quite a lot of professional reading as part of my studies and wondered how the advice and commentary in these articles would translate to the real life work of a teacher-librarian. There seemed to be a gap between what I was reading and what I was experiencing. When I am in a school library for research, study, work, or visiting, part of me continues to view the library through the lens of the vulnerable child I was. It was from that point of view that I began to notice interactions between library workers and students that would have discouraged my young self from voluntarily visiting the library. I began to wonder how and why the interactions I saw were shaped the way they were and why they were consistent across several libraries in several school districts.

I have worked part-time in several school libraries and have some field experience as a student teacher of middle school language arts. My limited practical experience in school libraries gives me the neophyte's eye when it comes to watching how a teacher-librarian negotiates work. I am also not bringing habits that are set from years of practical experience. I have not been socialized into education, so I have an outsider perspective in the school environment. This perspective allows me to see and question the patterns that those socialized in the field might take for granted.

### **Problem Statement and Questions**

Unseen ruling relations help shape and organize the work of the school librarian. These ruling relations can be discovered with the methods of institutional ethnography, which can explicate the power structures and ruling relations that shape the work of the school librarian. An institutional ethnography starts from the standpoint of the school librarian and works from that standpoint to examine how the work is coordinated by

institutions. Others who work in this school and in other school settings will see and experience the ruling relations in different ways.

## Questions

- How does one librarian understand the power structures of the institutions she works within?
- How is school library work tied into institutional and ruling relations?
- How does one librarian negotiate the power structures of the institutions she works within?
- How do these ruling relations express themselves in the work?

## Critical Framework

The conceptual framework of this research comes from Dorothy Smith's Institutional Ethnography, a frame of inquiry that is designed to show how work is organized outside of the local setting. Institutional ethnography is a sociology for people (Smith, 2005). It is a frame of inquiry for people to examine their work and how it is shaped. It is not objective because people are not objects and the coordination of their life is not objective. The desire to make changes is implicit in the frame of inquiry.

The pervasiveness of the relations of ruling and the objectification of these structures are what makes them so difficult to make visible to people who take them for granted. Smith (2005) argues that *traditional sociology* objectifies people and their doings and precludes inquiry and discovery from within the topic. Institutional ethnography is grounded in the standpoint of the people whose experiences are being explicated and it tries to make those ruling structures visible. The method of inquiry does not turn the people whose experiences are being studied into aggregated, context-free

numbers or anonymous survey quotes. “The promise of institutional ethnography is that it maintains the subjectivity of those whose experience is problematized” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 101). The relations of ruling are part of the individual’s experience that can disappear when parts of the experience are looked at out of context of his or her life. Smith (2005) addresses issues of shifting the focus from a critique of individual workers and their competence to a critique of the work process and work tasks themselves. A critique of the work process and work tasks can answer questions about pervasive problems that appear across localities, such as the problem interactions that began my inquiry.

Maintaining the focus on work processes was a key concern of mine as I embarked on a study of a school’s library program. In no way do I want to criticize or embarrass the individuals who work to make the school libraries happen. Rather, I want to work with people to discover where they have power to make changes to the system and where the power comes from. I knew from my experiences in several libraries that the problems I was noticing could not be coming from the library workers themselves. They were simply too pervasive across the settings. There were local differences, but it seemed clear that something outside the setting was influencing the work.

Dorothy Smith began developing her alternative to “traditional” sociology when she realized that traditional sociology looked at life as if the observer/ researcher could stand outside and view life impartially. Smith’s (1987) notion of discourse is derived from Foucault, but she expands the notion from statements alone to:

actual ongoing practices and sites of practice, the material forms of texts  
[...], the methods of producing texts, the reputational and status structures,

the organization of powers intersecting with other relations of ruling in state agencies, universities, professional organizations, and the like (p. 214).

She views discourse as socially organized and coordinating local practices.

Discourse shapes how people relate to other people in everyday life; in this case, how people in the discursive category of “teachers” relate to people in the discursive category of “students.” Their relations are shaped by statements, practices, and texts in education. “Discourse refers to translocal relations COORDINATING the practices of definite individuals talking, writing, reading, watching, and so forth, in particular local places at particular times” (emphasis in the original) (Smith, 2005, p. 224). These practices can reveal where power is situated and how it is conveyed, which can be traced back to those translocal relations. A researcher can look for examples of how people talk about certain subjects, such as students or parents, and trace those ways of talking to a larger idea that governs the work associated with those subjects. In this study, the work of the hall pass was coordinated by the view of students as untrustworthy. This view is governed by a power relation so pervasive in education that when I talked about it with people from different school backgrounds they agreed that hall passes were necessary to keep students from getting into trouble.

I will be using a generous notion of work in this study. “By institutional ethnographers, ‘work’ is used in a generous sense to extend to anything done by people that takes time and effort, that they mean to do, that is done under definite conditions and with whatever means and tools, and that they may have to think about” (Smith, 2005, p. 151). Any work the librarian does, including the work of being a parent, friend, or partner, has the potential of shaping her work as a librarian. I am especially interested,

though, in the work the librarian specifically associates with being a school librarian or an educator. “The concept of work and work knowledge as they are conceived in institutional ethnography orients the researcher to learn from people’s experiences regarding what they actually do, how their work is organized, and how they feel about it” (Smith, 2005, p. 155). Rather than allowing institutional definitions of work to shape the analysis of this work, I observed and analyzed the work the key participant and others actually performed during my ten weeks on site.

Location, standpoint, and authority are key concepts used in specific ways in institutional ethnography. Location does not describe a physical space, although a physical space can be part of a participant’s location. Location refers to where the participant is located in the processes being explicated. In this research, the key participant is located in the school library as a full-time professional faculty member with similar status to teachers. Standpoint can be described simply as a person’s point of view, but is informed by the person’s background, experiences, gender, and location, among other elements. Discovering the key participant’s standpoint was one goal of this research. The participant’s authority comes from her experiences of work, along with her school library certification.

The key participant, several other workers, and I shared the standpoint of being mothers, working to be available to our children. We have all made decisions about our paid work and our lives based on our work as mothers. The key participant, Eliza, changed careers in part to be more available to her children, as did I. She left her work at a small business, while I left journalism. My standpoint is also that of a graduate student trying to learn more about school library work, in part to inform my future teaching and

research and in part to contribute to political changes that would make books, reading, and literacy more available to young people, regardless of gender, race, or class. My location was between two worlds. One location is that of a university student fulfilling institutionally-defined goals for proving myself worthy of earning a doctorate and the other location was that of a worker in a school library, trying to avoid inconveniencing my participants and hoping to contribute to their work as they are contributing to mine. I also wanted to properly serve the children I would encounter. My authority comes in part from the backing of my institution through the doctoral-level education, the research proposal process, and the university's Institutional Review Board process and in part from experiences as a reflective participant-observer.

## **Data Collection**

### **Setting**

The middle school I selected is one of three sixth- and seventh-grade middle schools in a Midwestern college town of about 100,000 people. The school was built in the mid-1990s in a growing area of town. About 70 percent of the students at the school are white, about 22 percent are black, about five percent are Asian, and three percent are Hispanic. About 31 percent of the students in the school are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. About 98 percent of classes are taught by "highly qualified" teachers, as defined by the state. This means the teachers have full teaching certificates, bachelor's degrees, and proven competency in a state evaluation in the subjects they teach. Almost 60 percent of the staff have advanced degrees. The student to classroom teacher ratio is 14 to one. This information comes from a state government Web page. I have called the school Virginia Russell Middle School, or RMS for short.

I was already familiar with the basic layout of the school, having done field experience teaching language arts in another middle school in the district with an identical layout. The media center is a large purpose-built room with two entrances, one on the west wall and one on the north wall. The area is divided into quarters with the use of shelving and walls. Half of the room has tables with four chairs. A set of low bookcases for reference sources divided that area. Student projects focusing on a specific book were displayed on top of that set of bookcases. That area is separated from the fiction area by the circulation desk. The fiction area included a comfortable seating area of upholstered chairs. Two carts displayed new books, another cart was devoted to certain popular authors such as Avi and Andrew Clemens, and a fourth was jammed with picture books. The area next to the fiction area is walled off for the offices of the media specialist and the information technology specialist.

Eight computers line the south wall, which separates the media center from a computer lab. The media specialist is responsible for scheduling this computer lab for teachers. Near the computer lab door is a large printer/ fax machine. A copyright guide for teachers hangs on the wall above the printer.

On the west wall, above the non-fiction shelves, hang posters encouraging young people to read. On the north wall hang more posters featuring young people along with some travel posters also encouraging reading. As students walk by between classes, they hit the walls from the outside, sometimes knocking the posters askew. Under the posters, on top of the shelves, media center workers display books with their covers out. I learned that this was not just to promote those books. This is also to make up for the fact that there is not enough shelf space in the library if all of the books are checked in.

The room is bright thanks to daylight streaming in from high windows in the fiction section. The light is so bright that the previous media specialist had to cover two panes of window with black paper because the light was triggering the circulation desk's handheld scanner and causing errors. The circulation desk is a counter that is about waist high. Circulation records are managed on a PC desktop computer networked to the district's catalog. The circulation area is separated from the fiction area by waist-high bookcases placed back to back. The bookcases facing the circulation area hold book repair tools, books on hold, damaged books, the media center's small VHS tape collection, and some manuals about running the library media center. On top of the bookcases are bookmarks, tape, staplers, and scissors for student use. The top was also used to store books being weeded and books that were being cleaned.

Across the hall from the library are the teacher workroom and the lit center, which is a special reading classroom and book storage room combined. The teacher workroom is a large area divided in half, with restrooms in the middle. On one side is the teacher lunchroom and soda machines and on the other side is a work room with a large table, the laminator, a copy machine, and cabinets with paper supplies. The lit center is another large room lined with bookcases. There are three adult workspaces in the lit center: a desk for a reading specialist who splits her time between this school and a junior high, a desk for a reading helper, and a desk for the full-time reading coach, who is also responsible for the books in the room. The books are reference books and sets of fiction and non-fiction books that teachers can check out to use in classrooms.

## Participants

The key participant in this study is the school librarian, whose viewpoint and experiences are the starting point for the institutional ethnography. Eliza (a pseudonym) is an *initial certification* MLS graduate with four years of experience in an elementary school library and two months of experience in a middle school library. An *initial certification librarian* is a person who enters school librarianship without professional classroom teaching experience. To gain state certification, an *initial certification librarian* earns a master of library science equivalent degree while also taking a state-required number of credit hours of teaching-related classes.

Key researchers in school librarianship emphasize the importance of a school librarian being a teacher, with some emphasizing the importance of a classroom teaching background. This assumption is taken for granted and perpetuated by privileging teaching certification in state standards for school librarians. Initial certification librarians come to school librarianship from a different standpoint than the former teacher assumed by the literature to be the norm. Eliza was selected because of her willingness to participate in the project and because she is an initial certification librarian. Initial certification librarians need to learn how to understand and negotiate the ruling relations of the institution of education and of the school building. While certified teachers need to learn to negotiate ruling relations from a different location and standpoint as they transition from classroom teaching to librarianship, starting from the standpoint of an initial certification librarian gave me an entry into the site from the standpoint of a person who might still be questioning and examining parts of school work life that a classroom teacher might take for granted. Choosing an initial certification librarian as the key

participant also shows a perspective that has been neglected in school library research. The standpoint of the initial certification librarian is not often seen in the research or professional literature. These librarians start as outsiders in the institution of education and have not yet learned to take the ruling relations for granted. They are also not enmeshed in the mythologies surrounding teaching. Exploring from their standpoint can make ruling relations more visible.

Although children participate in the work of the school library, students were excluded from direct interviews because of privacy considerations. Students were involved in observed interactions, but the focus on such observations was on what the interactions reveal of ruling relations and how they revealed the relations. If potentially sensitive student information (such as information about overdue library books) could inform the understanding of ruling relations, this information was noted only as it reflected ruling practices and not with identifying details.

Other participants included Charlotte, the reading coach who runs the lit center across the hall from the media center; Rosie, the media center aide; two teachers; and Chris, the Information Technology specialist whose office is also in the media center. All participants are referred to by pseudonyms.

## **Methods of Data Collection**

Data collection was aimed at getting information about how the key participant and others around her understand the social organization of their work. I followed Eliza around with a notebook and pen, jotting down notes throughout the day. I discuss what I did with those notes in the section on analysis. I also interviewed Eliza and a reading coach and read documents they read or recommended to me, including the student

handbook. Themes emerged as I examined, questioned, and talked about the observations and interviews with Eliza, Charlotte, my colleagues at the university, and my mentors. Students were not interviewed.

A school is a closed environment, functioning within the institution of education, and serving children. Key concerns in collecting data were avoiding disrupting the school day and protecting the academic privacy of the students and the employment privacy of the adults. Methods of collecting and analyzing data took those factors into account. Outside of the media center, I tried to remain unobtrusive by shadowing Eliza, while inside the media center and lit center, I was a more active participant-observer. I did not write down identifying information about students while doing my observations, except to note if the same student was regularly interacting with the workers.

Data collection within a school setting must not interfere with the education of the students, which means the researcher must be unobtrusive in the environment. The researcher must also avoid inhibiting the work of the staff and faculty. Data collection must also protect the privacy of the participants and non-participants at the site. This research must not become a burden for the participant, although it will require extra work. I tried to contribute to the smooth running of the media center by shelving books, helping to cover, repair, and clean books, helping students with technological issues, and helping with extra work created by some of the projects Eliza was involved in. These projects and my involvement are discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

When collecting data, I allowed the experiences of the participants to determine which data became necessary. I tried to avoid letting the institutional understanding subsume the actual experiences. Specifically, this means I watched for use of

institutional language that covers up what is actually happening. I also tried to make sure I did not take parts of the work for granted. It is easy to assume that parts of the work are the way they are because that is the way things should be, but even the parts of work that everyone takes for granted are shaped by ruling relations.

### *Observations*

I worked in the school from the middle of March until the end of May. I had intended to observe until the last day of school, but school district officials decided school would end a week early because there had been no snow days. I was away at a conference during the last week of the school year. I did not observe on any Wednesdays, due to other obligations in my life. With only a couple of exceptions, I worked a full day on every observation day. While this was a relatively short timeframe for observations, the limited amount of time I spent at the school allowed me to maintain my outsider perspective.

I carried a small black notebook and pen, and jotted down notes throughout the day. At first, Eliza introduced me as the doctoral student who was studying her work. Very few students or teachers questioned my presence, likely due in part to the fact that the district is in a college town and usually has several people conducting research or working on a dissertation at any given time. During my time in the school, two of the administrators were in the dissertation stage of their doctoral degrees. On the very rare occasion a student or teacher did ask who I was, I told them I was helping out in the library and doing some research.

I worked in the library for at least three full school days a week. In the media center, I was a participant-observer, but at meetings and visits outside the media center, my observation technique was more of a shadowing technique (Quinlan, 2008).

Shadowing is observing without participating, which I felt was more appropriate in district media specialist meetings, faculty meetings, and some classroom technology trouble-shooting. At other times, I was a full participant, helping students with projects, recommending books to students and teachers, and helping with collection decisions.

I used the analysis technique of writing the ethnography as I collected data, comparing new data to previous notes, along with clarifying observations, and sharing conceptual maps with the key participant. The duration of the participant observation period was about ten weeks. I also attended district librarian meetings, faculty meetings, and other library-related meetings the librarian attends. I ate lunch with Eliza, Rosie, and the other specialists who regularly joined them. I tried to be present enough to see how decisions are made without interrupting the friendships developed at work.

I asked Eliza to perform some work processes while describing what she is doing and why. This cognitive walk-through helped Eliza and I discover which processes she takes for granted and might spur her own questioning and encourage an ethnographic view of her work, including the work that is not institutionally recognized. In my field notes, I carried out cognitive walk-throughs of some of the tasks I perform and how they are coordinated. I was looking for elements of the tasks that could reveal relations that were taken for granted. I also noted the parts of the school library work that I found uncomfortable or that made me feel angry. I felt that the parts of the work that challenge my own assumptions of what school libraries should be could both reveal my own

assumptions more clearly and might reveal ruling relations that had been taken for granted.

The observations and my reactions to them form the bulk of the findings. As I reread my notes each day, I wrote down or digitally recorded ideas as they emerged. I then talked with Eliza, Rosie, and Charlotte about the impressions I was forming. Elements of the work that became troubling to me, such as hall pass issues and standardized testing, were nearly invisible in the physical texts guiding the work, but became available for analysis through my observation notes.

### *Interviews*

I conducted one unstructured interview with the librarian near the end of the study. We sat at a table in the media center near the end of the school day. I recorded the interview with a digital recorder, but transcribed only the direct quotes. I listened to the full interview many times while analyzing my observation notes. The interview included questions prompted by observation in the media center and the analysis of texts related to the work. I also interviewed Charlotte, a reading specialist who worked closely with the media specialist. That interview was in the lit center and was recorded. The library aide, Rosie, declined to participate in an interview, but was otherwise involved in the observations. I also had informal conversations with others, including the library aide and library volunteers, teachers, administrators, and the district library coordinator.

From the interviews, I learned more about the participants' backgrounds with libraries and what they say about libraries. Because the interviews occurred late in the data collection period, during what turned out to be my last two weeks at the site, I asked

about the participants' perceptions of the main themes I felt I identified while reading and re-reading my observation notes.

### ***Textual analysis***

Texts play a role in enforcing and transmitting ruling relations. “While we have valuable things to learn from discourse analysis as well as from the field of rhetoric, institutional ethnography recognizes texts not as a discrete topic, but as they enter into and coordinate people’s doings” (Smith, 2005, p. 170). The texts were not a focus of the research for what they were. For example, a discourse analysis of the handbook for library media specialists might reveal some ruling assumptions about school librarians, but such an analysis would fall short in showing how those ruling assumptions shape their daily work. In this study, texts came open for analysis when they appeared to activate work processes. The parts of the text I focus on are the parts that I observed influencing the work or the culture. I focused the textual analysis on texts identified by the key participant and other participants in order to keep the study to a manageable size. These texts included the student handbook, Eliza's evaluation portfolio, an LMS handbook kept behind the circulation desk, fliers and brochures produced for students and parents, and a book all of the media specialists in the district were reading together and discussing at regular meetings. I read these documents and compared the statements they made to what I was observing every day. I noted tensions and disjunctures, especially in the idealized library presented in the book the media specialists were reading and talked through the ideas I was forming with Eliza, Rosie, and Charlotte.

### ***Data collection: How it actually happened***

The course of data collection was shaped by outside influences more than I expected. Before observing the media specialist and aide at work, I envisioned plenty of time for interviews (perhaps reflecting my own perception of the amount of down-time a media specialist has). I also had hoped for an opportunity to interview several more teachers during the school year. The institutional processes for gaining approval to enter the site took longer than I had planned for and left less time in the school year than I had intended. However, the restricted amount of time kept the data collected somewhat manageable.

During the observation period, students were participating in yearly standardized testing. As a parent and a member of the community, I had been aware of the standardized testing happening at approximately this time of year across the state. I did not think about the impact the testing would have on my study, revealing to me that even as the librarian participates in the same activities as teachers, the participation of the librarian is invisible.

### **Analysis**

The framework of institutional ethnography has no clear instructions for how one should carry out analysis (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). “The analytic goal is to make visible the ways the institutional order creates the conditions of individual experience” (McCoy, 2006 p. 109) Analysis in institutional ethnography is carried out through writing about the data and the arguments the researcher is developing, remembering that “the ultimate purpose of the institutional ethnography is *not* to produce an account *of* or *from* those insiders’ perspectives,” but to get to “an account that explicates the social

relations of the setting” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 90) . Campbell (2004) suggests the researcher begin analysis by talking about what the the data is showing him or her. Then, the researcher returns to the problematic and analyzes early ideas about the problematic in light of what the researcher has learned from informants. Then, the process of writing begins, with the researcher using the data as evidence for arguments and analyzing each argument and each piece of evidence to find meaning.

I typed up the handwritten notes from the observations and added in other observations that were triggered from the handwritten notes. Notes that were added in after the observation time were enclosed with brackets to differentiate them from the notes taken during the observation time. I also kept a separate electronic journal to write about themes I was discovering and arguments I was developing. After about two weeks, I began to notice patterns emerging from the observations. I kept word processing files of the observation write-up for each day and as I started to notice themes and patterns, I copied relevant notes to a separate file devoted to that theme. Some observations fit into multiple themes. I sorted the notes and themes by rereading the observations, rather than by using software designed for qualitative coding. I felt that doing the sorting “by hand” kept me closer to the data.

As I studied the data and tried to make sense of what I was seeing, I talked out my arguments with Eliza, with colleagues, and with my mentors. At first, I felt reluctant to discuss what I was seeing, realizing that none of it made sense to me yet and I could not yet see what was important. My first point of entry into analyzing the social relations came after I had been on site for about two weeks. I noticed how much time and effort Eliza and Rosie put into managing and cooperating with the school’s hall pass system.

The pervasiveness of hall passes in schools gave me my first understanding of a social relation at work.

Throughout the analysis period, some of which coincided with the data collection period, I reread the observations chronologically and by theme. These patterns and themes informed the interviews with Eliza and Charlotte. Eliza clarified some of my concerns about the theme of technology. She also concurred with some of the aspects I found troubling about the hall pass policy and the Positive Behavior Supports system. At the same time, in her defense of these systems, I found other assumptions built in—assumptions about students and parents. These assumptions reinforced my ideas about the surveillance system in the school and the potential barriers to access.

The focus of my analysis was on discovering how the work of those involved in the school library was institutionally coordinated. My goal was not to focus on how an individual does her work but on how that work is shaped, not just by the other people in the school, but by the district, the community, peers in other areas, and historical forces.

### **Research quality measures**

According to Campbell, “The scientific nature or validity of research results is established when methodological procedures are logically consistent with an accepted and adequately described theory of knowing and are demonstrably followed” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 55). In addition to creating a clear research plan based in the institutional ethnography method of inquiry, I employed member-checking at all stages possible to be sure that my interpretations of the librarian’s experiences are accurate. Using several methods of data collection and discussing the findings with participants with different standpoints at different locations also helped validate the findings.

An institutional ethnography does not seek generalizability of the experiences of individuals. It is not an examination of how a particular phenomenon affects specific individuals, but is an example of how the experiences of embodied individuals can explicate social organization and ruling relations. “Generalizability in institutional ethnography relies on discovery and demonstration of how ruling relations exist in and across many local settings, organizing the experiences informants talked about” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004 p. 89). The generalizability of this study would be in showing a way of viewing library work in schools as socially constructed. People who work in other areas of this school and in other schools can recognize some aspects of the ruling relations I examine here.

The standpoint of an institutional ethnographer can be difficult to maintain. Smith and Griffith (1987) learned how easy it is for the researcher to slip into the standpoint of the institution when they were beginning their study of mothers’ work in relation to the schooling of their children. They found they were looking at the mothers’ work from the standpoint of school organization. When I conducted my interviews, observations, and data analysis, it was essential not to fall into the habit of evaluating the library through the lens of the institutions. “[Institutional accounts are] likely to be describing a work process as if it were performed by a position or category rather than by the person the researcher’s talking to...” (Smith, 2005, p. 155). If I found myself constructing sentences using institutional language, I recognized that I was falling into the institutional viewpoint. Another way to avoid the institutional viewpoint is to avoid evaluating the librarian’s work in comparison to standards transmitted and enforced by the institution.

Comparing the librarian's "collaboration" with teachers with the idealized image in AASL documents would be one example of slipping into the standpoint of an institution.

### **Exiting the Field**

I had not given a lot of thought to how I would end my observations. I had intended to return from a trip and spend another two weeks at the school. One of those weeks would be the last week of school and the following week would be the week Eliza and Charlotte were doing their extra week of work. When Eliza and Rosie learned near the end of April that classes would be ending earlier than shown on the calendar, I realized I would miss these weeks because of a work-related trip I had planned before starting the observations. My exit from the field was abrupt, but I maintained contact with key participants through e-mail and member-checking.

### **Limitations**

This is a snapshot of a single period of time in the construct of a school year. This was Eliza's first year at this school. She was still getting to know the teachers and adjusting to the differences between this school and the smaller elementary school she had just left. However, although she might have experienced and reacted to the ruling relations differently in a different year, those ruling relations would still exist and could still be made visible through an institutional ethnography.

I spent about ten weeks visiting the school three to four days a week, but was not able to be at the school every day of the week. Therefore, there are gaps in my understanding of the relations governing Eliza's work with some of the teachers and with school administrators. I was not able to interview the administrators due to their busy schedules, although I had a few informal interactions with the principal and two assistant

principals. I did not spend enough time with them or observe them enough to be able to say anything about their roles in shaping school library work.

Institutional ethnography has some drawbacks as a method of inquiry. The intimate nature of an institutional ethnography brings up difficult issues of confidentiality and protection of participants in a sociology that does not objectify the participants. Aggregating experiences and removing identifying information allows for a certain measure of anonymity that is not as easy to attain in an institutional ethnography. I attempted to maintain the participants' anonymity and confidentiality to the greatest possible extent, and was careful to exclude elements of interviews that could put the participants at risk.

## Chapter 4 School Library Work

“It needs to be pointed out that we don't just check in and check out and re-shelve books”—Eliza, in response to my question about what she wants people to know about school library work.

### Findings

In this chapter, I will map institutional relations involved in Eliza's daily work, which is often fragmented and carried out in short bursts throughout the day. I will show how these relations objectify students and make library work invisible. This description of the work will explore how Eliza's day is coordinated by ruling relations, how the work hooks into other institutions, how her work is activated by text and how, at the same time, she produces texts that are activated by others.

One function of the social organization of school library work is that the work is often made invisible. Much of library work is invisible in the published literature and in the perceptions of other adults working in education. Media specialists and librarians in other settings are aware of the invisibility of their work on some levels, but without a close analysis of how the social organization of the work makes it invisible, some of the attempts to make the work more visible and assert its value has the unintended effect of diminishing the intellectual work of librarianship. For example, some projects Eliza carried out during the observation period are later attributed to “the district.” (Book Group Day, for example) Library work such as reading and evaluating sources is done at home. Other work becomes invisible because it is not seen by others inside or outside the

institution, such as administering state-required standardized tests to students with special needs. The following narrative explores the work Eliza performs each day and how that work is coordinated with and by others. Social organization was apparent in how students accessed the media center, how technology was managed, and how collaboration was carried out. These categories emerged from reading and analyzing notes taken during the observation periods.

## **Background**

Eliza became a school media specialist four years before the school year in which this research project began. “It just had a lot of good benefits and it was something I thought I would enjoy doing.”

When Eliza went to school to earn her master of arts in library science, she had to take extra courses so she could get an initial teaching certification. The coursework required to become an initial certification school library media specialist is very specific and requires a commitment from the student that this is the path he or she wants to pursue. There is very little flexibility in this coursework. Eliza was able to do her practicum work, practical experience in a school media center, early in her program, which she says helped her realize this was what she wanted to do. Eliza had many reasons to become a media specialist, but one important one was that it was compatible with her mothering work.

“I liked the fact that the schedule went with my kids!”

As a mother, Eliza has already been negotiating a schedule imposed on her life by having children in school. The schedule and hours of library media specialist work allow her to be accessible to her two children, one of whom attends school within a short walk

of RMS. Eliza is able to carry out the work of being a “dance mom” for her younger daughter, which often requires taking long trips to larger cities and keeping evenings and weekends free for rehearsals and competitions. It is not unusual for media specialists to say that they were attracted to the job because of the convenient schedule (Shannon, 2008). The schedule is convenient because it aligns with the schedule that shapes the days of millions of school children and their families in the United States. The school schedule is embedded in texts about how to parent and governs choices of parents, including where to work, where to live, and when to move.

Work in education provides regular hours with weekends and holidays off, and lengthy vacations compared to many other professions in the US. School library work provides Eliza with those benefits, plus several more that she appreciates. Working in the school building gives her access to a health professional (the school nurse), which makes managing a chronic health condition more convenient. Eliza appreciates those benefits, having transitioned from another line of work that required many more hours for much less pay. Eliza anticipates that school library work will also give her a more assured retirement plan than her previous work. “I knew teacher retirement was good, so the benefits... I didn't really have retirement at my other job, so that was a biggie right there, when you're approaching 40 you start thinking about retirement and you're like 'okay, I didn't care about it when I was 20, but now I gotta start thinking about it!' ” In addition to her mothering work, worries about having enough money to be able to retire helped drive her decision to become a school media specialist. Eliza had worked at a small business for 15 years before realizing that the Internet would mean that the work would not be as lucrative as it had been in the past.

Eliza feels her previous work in another field gives her a different perspective on work in education than some of the people who went into teaching work straight out of college. She accepts that school library work does not stay within the socially constructed understanding of hours of “the school day.” At the same time, she appreciates the comfort and security of the job that others might take for granted.

“It just sounded interesting. And I had worked in the library in college so I did kind of have that background.” Eliza doesn't mention any particular love of children or desire to work with children in interviews. While some might view this as an indication that she does not see work with children as one of the key benefits of the work, it is clear from her interactions with students that she respects them as people. Unlike other adults who do youth service work in libraries, Eliza has not expressed a particular love of literature for young adults as being a motive to seek school library work. However, she does read and enjoy young adult literature.

There are elements of ruling relations in the ease of entry into education (compared with other professions like law or medicine), the continued “good” retirement benefits, the need to be self-sufficient in retirement, the very existence of a school librarian, the efforts of others in the district to defend the need for a certified school librarian. Eliza’s own experiences as a student likely shape her expectations for the school library she now runs. Eliza does not remember being a passionate user of her school libraries when she was a student. She remembers checking out books in elementary school, but not doing very much else at the school library. She remembers visiting the school library in middle school and in her freshman and sophomore years of high school. “I remember [my high school library] being ‘you can go in with a class’... I

don't remember ever going in there for any other reason other than with a class. I remember going to the public library to get what I needed for research.” Her mother took her to the public library a lot, so she remembers going to story time, checking out books, and participating in summer reading. Now, she says she is “not a huge public library user,” though she does check out books from the middle school media center regularly.

This study is not examining what Eliza does and does not do—rather, it is an investigation of how the work is shaped starting from the standpoint of this media specialist. Although the rest of this work might be read as a criticism of the institutional structures and relations, it is important to remember that as a real person in an actual workplace, Eliza contributed quite a lot to the school and to the district. Her major reading promotion events, the district’s Book Group Day and the school’s Mythology Bee, gave students more access to literacy information, while her work with technology and collaboration helped contribute to interesting learning work for students. In addition, Rosie kept the media center neat and the circulation system running smoothly so students and teachers could access information and leisure reading more easily.

## **The Work**

Eliza's official work day is from 7:30 to 3:15. However, like most media specialists I have worked with, she carries out school library work in the evenings and on the weekends as well. The work associated with her ability to provide *reader's advisory* to students and teachers is often carried out invisible students and teachers. This is the work of reading the books of the collection. Work associated with ordering materials for the collection is also carried out outside the view of others in the school. This work includes reading reviews and other collection development aids. Even if others in the

school were able to see Eliza reading these materials, the intellectual work remains invisible and the perception would be that the media specialist gets to sit around and read all day... a perception that is familiar to most librarians, no matter what kind of site they work in and no matter which patrons they serve.

The media center also has a full-time aide. Rosie has been a media center aide for several years, but until this year, she split her work week between two schools. This year, she is assigned only to RMS. Rosie's work day is from 8:15 am-2:45pm. Her hours are strictly limited in her contract. The work of the aide, though invisible in the research, was essential for Eliza to be able to do what she did all day. Eliza would not be able to leave the media center to trouble-shoot technology, go to professional development meetings, mentor a new media specialist at another school, or do much of the other work that requires her to leave the media center. "If I just had to be in here all day, that would severely limit what I could do" (Eliza). If she were to leave the media center without Rosie there, she would have to either close the media center or rely on teachers to assure that the materials were checked out and in properly. She would also return to a pile of hundreds of books to shelve on a daily basis. The high circulation that Eliza attributes to the fixed schedules would lead to a large backlog of books to be shelved. Rosie handles most of the day-to-day collection and circulation maintenance jobs, including shelving. She also handles much of the work associated with managing student traffic in the media center. The work of the media center aide is often glossed over in the literature on school library research, much as the actual daily work of the school librarian disappears in "objective research." Rosie also carries out intellectual work associated with librarianship, including correcting catalog records. Like Eliza, she reads the media center

materials at home, which allows her to discuss books with the students who browse the media center's shelves.

Being present in the media center when students are there as part of a class is part of Eliza's work. She tries to be there, but she is glad that the media center also has an aide so she can leave the media center to help teachers in classrooms. During my observation period, the times she left the media center were to provide technical support. Much of the circulation-related interactions with students were between the students and Rosie, including much of the reader's advisory.

### **“The School Day”**

In their research on mothering, Smith and Campbell point out how ruling relations work to construct and shape the concept of *the school day* (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Smith, 2005). The concept of *the school day* governs the work of teachers, staff, students, and parents and is transmitted through handbooks, contracts, emails, and oral communications. The school day is expanded for faculty to include a half an hour before classes are scheduled to begin and twenty minutes after the last class is dismissed. The school day is generally explained from the standpoint of students and classroom teachers, but Eliza and Rosie experience the rhythm of the school day in a different way.

The school day for Eliza starts at 7:30 am, when she is expected to arrive at the media center to open it for morning study hall. The school day for Rosie begins at 8:15 am. Her work is governed by a contract that is based on hours worked, rather than work accomplished. Her contract prevents her from working more than six hours a day total, not counting her half hour of lunch. Although I did not understand exactly how she would be sanctioned, it was clear that she was not allowed to work past 2:45pm. This has

to do with human resources issues, including pay and benefits, and is standard in many workplaces in the United States. However, she and Eliza both have added work related to the restrictions. Part of their work becomes ensuring that Rosie does not work too many hours. Eliza, on the other hand, usually ended the school day at about 3:20pm, and stayed late several times during the observation period for meetings and special events.

Unlike classroom teachers, whose work can isolate them from interactions with other adults (Lortie, 1975), Eliza sees several other adults regularly throughout the day in addition to Rosie. Chris, the IT specialist, has an office in the media center. Charlotte, the reading coach who works across the hall in the lit center, stops by when she is not working with students. Sarah, a reading specialist who splits her work week between RMS and a junior high school in the district, also visits during her days at RMS. Eliza also sees the team reading teachers when they bring their classes into the media center on their scheduled days.

## **Teams**

The school's scheduling and teacher assignment system is based on the middle school team concept. The students are divided into six teams, with three teams at each grade level. Official documents say the students “stay on the same team for their two years at RMS” and that the teams stay with the same teachers for the two years. The students on the teams take all of their core (content) classes (with the occasional exception of reading) with their team's teachers. Another group of teachers teach the elective subjects, which include band, chorus, art, and physical education, among others. Sixth grade students are required to take each elective in rotating six-week blocks, while seventh grade students can choose among the electives. While the idea is that the

students and teachers will form a type of family unit as described in school documents, one reality of teaming is that students and teachers are more mobile than the concept acknowledges. The team concept implies that the team is an entity that will stay the same as students and teachers move in and out. The concept objectifies the individuals on the team. While the family metaphor is attractive, the “teams” metaphor is closer to a sports franchise, in which players move in and out frequently, but the “team” is still the same entity.

The administration of RMS allows team teachers to determine part of their own schedule. They are assigned a block of time in the schedule for core classes, but it is up to the core teachers to decide exactly how that block of time will be divided up. Studying the implementation of the team model was not the focus of this research, so I did not examine how the negotiations actually work and whether teachers are actually empowered to set the schedules. I had to accept this concept as a reality governing the school schedule.

### **Fixed Scheduling**

Many of the students at this school have regular teacher-mediated access to the media center. The previous media specialist put a “fixed” schedule in place, so most students come into the media center with their reading teachers. Eliza has mixed feelings about fixed scheduling. She believes that students learn library lessons more effectively when the lessons are taught in context. At the same time, in the reality of schools and the pressures teachers are under, it is easy to imagine media center time being put off indefinitely. This aspect is something that is rarely acknowledged in published literature about flexible scheduling. Flexible scheduling is preferred by the authors in the book

every media specialist in the district is reading (Rosenfeld & Loertscher 2007), although Eliza notes that there could be tensions integrating flexible scheduling into the highly scheduled school. “They say that it's more advantageous to learning if kids come when they need to come, but schools are all based on scheduling. How can you have flexible scheduling here [in the media center] and fixed scheduling everywhere else?” (Eliza). While it is considered a best practice, flexible access is only a part of ensuring students have access to the media center. Another part is being sure that students are also truly able to choose to come to the media center.

Since classes generally come to the media center during their reading class time once a week, a pervasive part of Eliza and Rosie's work is understanding and interpreting each team's schedule. Four teams are scheduled in the media center one day a week each, while two other teams share a day. My observations did not include the shared day. Not only do Eliza and Rosie learn when each team has its core block, they also learn how the core block is divided up. The information about when teams have their blocks is on a paper schedule that each teacher has, but the information about how the block is divided up is discovered informally. Eliza and Rosie schedule their activities and lunch break “around” the schedule of the team using the media center each day, taking their lunch at the same time as the team. Since the students eat their lunches in shifts by team, the schedule for Eliza and Rosie can vary widely. While the students eat lunch at the same time every day, lunchtime for Eliza and Rosie can vary from just after 10:30 am to almost 1 pm.

After the school building was built in the mid-1990s, the student population grew so much that the district had to add portable classrooms outside. Despite efforts by

district and school administration to discourage the use of the word “trailers” to describe the portable classrooms, the word “trailer” was the one I usually heard when adults referred to the portable classrooms. One team and several electives are assigned to trailer classrooms.

## **Traffic**

Managing and directing the physical bodies of the students were ongoing jobs for all of the teachers in the school. Teachers were continually engaged in the work of keeping students in line, literally. Teachers repeatedly told students how to carry out the work of standing in line properly. In order to leave the media center at the end of the class period, most students had to line up properly and quietly. (Some teachers and some substitutes did not engage in this work, which was disruptive to the smooth flow of the day.)

Traffic at RMS was finely choreographed, with teachers letting classes out at staggered times and with each team assigned a path to follow. Teachers supervised the halls and directed traffic. On my very first day in the school, Eliza told me about the tension between her desire to provide access to students and her principal's request for her to participate in the traffic management of the dismissal of classes. She told me that the principal had asked her to do hall supervision after school. In her case, that would have meant she would have to stand in the hallway outside the media center to make sure students do not misbehave and to make sure they maintain the required traffic pattern. Eliza had a problem with that request because students come in to the media center after school and she would have them standing there waiting for her until she was done. She worried about them missing the bus.

Later, Eliza also mentioned her worries about having students in the media center unsupervised, but she was more concerned about them missing the bus because they would have to wait for her so they could check out. She had emailed the principal about the problem but never got a response (“this was months ago”) so she just decided to stay in the media center. She told me that the principal had not mentioned the request again. I did not discover right away just how much of an impact the principal's request would have on student access to the media center. The few minutes between class dismissal and the buses leaving is the only time the students have unmediated access to the media center.

The short conversation we had the first day of my observation period was just a hint of the organization of the work of teachers, media specialists, and students. The intent of the focus on traffic patterns is to help meet the stated goal in the student and faculty handbooks of providing an orderly learning environment for students. A question to ask might be how the work of providing an orderly learning environment for students can directly interfere with the work of providing access to information.

### **Methods used to manage large groups of people**

Very large schools require systems in place to manage the behavior of students. Educators have been looking for ways to keep students under control since the beginning of mass schooling. “The development of the parish schools, the increase in the number of their pupils, the absence of methods for regulating simultaneously the activity of a whole class, and the disorder and confusion that followed from this made it necessary to work out a system of supervision” (Foucault, 1995, p. 175). At RMS, the systems of supervision include a structured Positive Behavior Support (PBS) system, regimented

traffic patterns between classes and after school, hall passes, and reward systems. Some of the systems require close adult supervision while others make use of a token to represent adult supervision.

## **Positive Behavior Support**

The school district put a Positive Behavior Support (PBS) system in place several years earlier, during Eliza's first year as a full-time media specialist. The PBS system the district uses was developed by the University of Oregon in reaction to Individuals with Disabilities Act legislation in the late 1990s calling for specific types of behavior interventions (Sugai & Horner, 2002). This system is used in more than 500 schools across the country. As a specialist, Eliza liked that there was now a school-wide method for getting students' attention, rather than having each grade level or each teacher come up with a system of her own that Eliza and other specialists, who saw all of the students regularly, would have to remember. The year PBS was put into place, the school had four new specialists: an art teacher, music teacher, new counselor, and new media specialist. Some classroom teachers would get attention by holding up their fingers, some would lead students in a university cheer, some would clap... "everybody had their own way" (Eliza) to get the students' attention. Five weeks into that school year, the school adopted PBS. The specialists still had problems because some teachers were not doing it and the specialists felt that all of the teachers needed to adopt the same system or the students would not have a consistent signal to respond to.

The PBS system is a response to "the current problem behavior of students in elementary and middle schools" and reflects the belief that the intervention "requires a preventive, whole-school approach" (Sugai & Horner, 2002, p. 23). The view that the

behavior of students is a problem puts all children under a veil of suspicion. While communicating behavior expectations to those under one's supervision helps eliminate confusion about what is allowed and what is not, the system brings with it another level of surveillance. It continues to be a form of discipline, presented in words that appear positive and easy-to-understand, memorize, and repeat. For RMS and several other schools, those words are: Responsible, Respectful, Kind, and Safe (RRKS).

Eliza explains the school's positive behavior support (PBS) as a way to make up for parents' deficits in carrying out work related to school. In an interview, she said there appeared to be many students whose parents do not teach them how to act in school or who do not care how they act in school. She said, "It's sad that you have to teach kids how to act in school, but it's come to that" (Eliza). School makes many demands on parents, in addition to shaping their day. Educators have very specific, often unstated, expectations of the appropriate work of parents in connection with preparing their children for school (Reay, 1998; Griffith & Smith, 2005) and form judgments about parents based on the behavior of the children. However, those expectations often do not take into account the desires of the parents or the social sector in which the student lives (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Minke & Anderson, 2005). Eliza's statement that some parents do not teach their children how to behave in school reflects school expectations for parents. When that statement is examined closely, it can bring up the question of the difficulties a small family (one or two parents, possibly several siblings) might face in teaching a child how to behave appropriately in an environment that despite its claim on the word *family* is very different from a family in many ways, including its structure, its expectations, and the sheer number of people a student has to get along with every day.

The expectations also do not take into account the struggles families face outside of their obligations to school.

Gramsci (1988) suggests that many children participate in a civil society very different from the society in which many teachers live. Successfully entering the profession of teaching requires the resources to enter, pay for, and complete a four-year college degree along with a certain understanding of acceptable ways to function in society that are not immediately obvious to or accepted by people from other sectors of society. Many children come from families who might lack knowledge that people successful in the system of education might consider intuitive (Minke & Anderson, 2005; Nason, 1997). The child's society might even be actively antagonistic to the idealized version of society presented in school. The “child's consciousness is not something 'individual' (still less individuated), it reflects the sector of civil society in which the child participates, and the social relations which are formed within his family, his neighbourhood, his village, etc. The individual consciousness of the overwhelming majority of children reflects social and cultural relations which are different from and antagonistic to those which are represented in the school curricula” (Gramsci, 1988, p. 313). The school curriculum extends beyond academic work and into expectations for how a student is expected to respond to authority figures, how a student is expected to interact with peers, when students are expected to take care of their bodily needs, and so on.

Some of the issues Eliza and Rosie deal with in connection to the student circulation system come from the mobility of the students in a system not necessarily designed to keep track of many moves. Students transition in and out on a weekly basis.

When a new student came in at the beginning of May, adults asked “why do parents move at the end of the school year?” (This is institutional speak and shows an assumption that good parents will move during a time that is less disruptive to the student's schooling.) Many parents do not have the power or agency to determine when or where they move. They can be sent somewhere by a company or they can lose their job and have to move to live with relatives. This also explains how books end up in storage bins, moving boxes, or at Grandma's house.

The system disciplines teachers as well as students. For an end of the year evaluation, teachers at the school, including Eliza, were asked to take an online survey related to her perceptions of the Positive Behavior System in place at the school. Then the school was “inspected” for how closely it followed the PBS system. Eliza and I were not there the day the inspector came, but Rosie mentioned that one of the RRKS signs was not up. The inspector had apparently commented on that. The system treats students and teachers as potential behavioral problems that need to be managed. The PBS system shapes Eliza's daily work and her interactions with students. RRKS has to be incorporated into Eliza's library lessons. RRKS is represented in the student handbook as a way for students to help accomplish the school's mission “to inspire students to develop intellectually and socially in a community where everyone is respected, productive, and safe” (Student handbook).

The school also has a school-wide system in place to reward students who show approved behavior. This is not a requirement of the PBS system, but many schools use this type of token-based reward system (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Adults give students a piece of paper known as a RRKS (pronounced “rocks”) ribbon for showing the proper

behavior. Teams collect their ribbons and use them for rewards at the end of the year. Eliza does not agree with giving students rewards for doing what they're supposed to do. "I'm very lax at doing that here in the media center and there's been a couple of teachers who have said 'I don't feel like I should have to give them out for doing expected behavior; I feel like they should get them for above and beyond' and that's kind of how I feel about it, too" (Eliza). In addition to the surveillance by other teachers, there is an element of coercion in adult participation in the ribbon scheme. The ribbons can be traded in for parties and such, so teachers who would prefer not to participate might feel guilty and feel like they are punishing children.

Tangible rewards have been linked to reduced intrinsic motivation for learning (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001). Alfie Kohn compares the reward schemes in schools to reward use in dog training (Powell, 1998). Then there are the reactions of the students themselves. Eliza mentioned some times when she has given a student a ribbon for behaving appropriately and the student has looked at her as if to say "you think I want that, lady?" I watched a student receive a ribbon for pushing in chairs as her class was leaving. She did not smile or appear happy to be getting the ribbon. She actually seemed embarrassed. Teachers are put in the position of constantly evaluating student behavior and judging it against other students to determine who will get a ribbon and who will not (punishing by omission, punishing by using another, *better* student as an example.) The redirection and praise happens publicly. Students have not been given the power to give their opinion of these systems. Their consent (or assent) is assumed in this apparatus put into place to legally discipline them (Gramsci, 1988).

Seventh grade students who have exhibited desired behaviors are rewarded with a trip to an amusement park at the end of the school year. One of the desired behaviors is not having overdue, lost, or missing books from the media center. One student told Eliza in March that she had lost a book, and Eliza told her she wouldn't be able to go to the amusement park. Several teachers commented in March that students were already worrying about the trip and were not checking books out. They would not be allowed to go to the amusement park if they had overdue books. As the date of the class amusement park trip drew near, students began to ask about their account status. The amusement park trip was a form of coercion that had apparently unintended consequences. Although the objective was to teach the students that being responsible will get them rewards, the scheme seemed to also teach the students not to take risks. The risk of having an overdue library book was too great.

## **Hall Passes**

“What bothers me sometimes is I feel like we deter students from coming to the media center because we place so much emphasis on the hall pass and I think it kind of goes back to that RRKS thing where you have to have that set of rules and it’s gotta be this way...” (Eliza).

Hall passes are an element of the surveillance system of the school that appear to be taken for granted in the institution of education. The few staffers at RMS who mentioned hall passes directly viewed hall passes as a tool for ensuring the safety of children. While a search of the free web using the search term “hall passes” on the search engine Google turns up thousands upon thousands of schools using hall passes (along with multiple commercial sites selling hall passes,) a search of educational literature

using the term “hall passes” on the ERIC database turns up three results-- two student handbooks and one article describing hall passes as a technique in “A Comprehensive Approach to Drug Education,” published by the National Alliance for Safe Schools. Hall passes are such a pervasive part of schooling that few consider the possible consequences.

Every morning, students who want to go to the media center before class get study hall passes from a person handing out passes in the hallway just past the gym. There are 12 passes for each grade. The sixth grade students have to sign in to get a pass because the passes were *disappearing*. The passes are apparently first-come first serve. Perhaps this system is complicated by the fact that it rewards students who get to school earlier by giving them more choices about where to spend their before-school time, although many middle school students have no control over when they will arrive at school. When students get to the media center, they are supposed to hand their passes to Eliza. Eliza puts them in numerical order (if the process is working correctly, they should be in numerical order as the students are handing them in, as the students are not allowed to go to the restroom or go to their lockers.) At about 7:50, the assistant principal for discipline calls to make sure there is a correct number of students and passes. This happens every morning.

When students do not turn in passes, the adults assume they are keeping the passes and doing other things in the school building before class. However, one morning, Eliza counted passes and found that five were missing. When she called out to the students in the media center to bring up their passes, four students came up. They had forgotten to turn in the passes. Eliza checked the sign-in sheet and said she could guess

who had the fifth pass. It was a student who had apparently been in the media center. Another morning, I found a pass at the back of the room while straightening up after morning study hall. That was the only *missing* pass that day.

One morning, Eliza and I went to an elementary school with the new media specialist Eliza mentored. We arrived before class began and watched the flow of students turning in books, choosing new books, and checking them out. She points out that all the kids are in the media center without passes, but then they go to Russell and have to have passes.

During the day, students are only allowed in the media center if they have a pass from a teacher or if they are with a teacher who is scheduled to bring a class into the media center. With 750 students, there are three lunch shifts, so any given lunch time is class time for about two-thirds of the students. Students are not allowed to drop by the media center during the period of time between classes, even if only to drop off a book. Students who come in without a pass are told that they cannot turn in or check out books without a pass and that they must go back to their teacher and get a pass. The message that seems to be sent is that students are only truly welcome in the media center if they are with a teacher. If a pass represents teacher consent, then having a pass is similar to having a teacher along. Do students have a right to unmediated access to information? Is the media center the place for that?

Even students who follow the correct procedure to come to the media center are sometimes viewed with suspicion by media center workers and other adults. One enthusiastic media center supporter liked to get a pass from a different teacher each day and come in to check on the status of the books he had on hold. After several times, he

was told he could not come in to check on his holds any more—that he had to wait until he got a yellow slip from his teacher saying that his hold books came in. Later, he was banned from the media center because his parents and teachers said all he did was read Calvin and Hobbes comic books from the media center. This highlights a striking difference between a media center and other types of libraries. Most libraries will not ban patrons for checking out the *wrong* thing. Although this decision was not Eliza’s and she only found out about it after it had been made, the media center is part of the school and has to uphold decisions by teachers and administrators. The effect of these decisions on later library use is unknown.

In our interview, we talked about Eliza's experiences observing a high school library in the district that does not have a hall pass policy. She described how students came in and out all day long. She also talked about a friend who is a librarian at a junior high in a school in the district that is even more restrictive on student mobility. After classes begin, staff members “sweep” the halls looking for students who are not in class. Eliza's own daughter went to that school and got caught in the sweeps twice. The sweeps did cut down on students being late to class. Eliza sighed “this is what some students in the district have to look forward to.”

The hall pass work also includes an element of surveillance and discipline of others who do not play their part in the hall pass system. I do not remember observing Eliza carrying out this work, but many of the interactions between the aide and students were some form of the aide sending the student back to the teacher to get a pass. In addition to what hall passes might be teaching students about their right to access information or the right of others to control it, an immediate concern with the system has

to do with students who need access to the media center but are unwilling or unable to ask their teacher for the pass. The other side of this is library worker concerns that if they do not enforce the hall pass policy and students figure that out, students will claim that they are going to the media center but use that time to wander around the building. The hall pass system shows a pervasive lack of trust in students. Students cannot be trusted in the halls before class, so the hall pass keeps their behavior in check.

## **Signing In**

Eliza appreciates having the sign-in log, a notebook of the names of the students who have come to the media center on a pass. The system for signing in is not entirely intuitive and some students had trouble understanding it. Before class, students on the study hall pass sign in with their name, the time, and the name of their team. While classes are in session, students who come in on passes sign in with their name, the time, and the name of their teacher. Part of the daily work and interaction with students is reminding them to sign in. The media center workers seemed frustrated by the lack of adherence to the sign-in policy shown by some students. The work of signing in was prerequisite to seeking information. Students were not the only ones resistant to the signing in process. Although teachers are not required to sign in to use the media center, one teacher came in with some students and signed in as “Arnold Schwarzenegger.” He told Rosie, “See, Arnold Schwarzenegger is in your book.” Reflecting on the signing in process later, I realized that the students signing in at the media center reminded me of the sign-in process I had to go through to gain access to the school itself every day. While it makes sense to have *outsiders* sign in, it is possible that the sign in process at the

media center makes students coming to the media center without teachers subject to the same representation of being outsiders.

Signing in at the media center is presented in the student handbook as keeping them “safe.” Safety is a major focus at RMS. It is one of the four key ideas governing the school according to the PBS system. Safety is also the reason the media center doors are rigged with a door stop so they can remain locked but open all day. If there were a school shooting, Eliza and Rosie could pull the door stops out of the door push bar mechanism and quickly lock the media center. Although that was not a pervasive theme of our casual conversations, Eliza did mention once that the shootings at Columbine took place in the library.

At one point, Rosie chastised a student for running through the media center, telling him that he was *safe* and didn't need to run. It appeared to be an institutionally-enforced way of using a structured, imposed discourse to obscure the student's actual experience, feelings, or reason for running in the media center.

## **Hanging Out**

Hanging out in the media center, a common theme in the “library as safe haven” literature (Bush, 2003; Evarts, 2006) is discouraged at RMS. Rosie tells students that the media center is not a place to hang out. On a day when quite a few students come in on hall passes unexpectedly, Eliza and Rosie discuss whether the students have a substitute teacher that day, implying that their teacher must be someone who does not know the rules. When students start talking among themselves, Rosie moves them along by asking whether they are ready to check out.

More specifically, unmediated hanging out is discouraged. Students who come in with their teachers for their scheduled class periods engage in the same behaviors as the students who are told the media center is not a place to hang out. The only student I saw allowed to hang out at the media center was a student who had religious reasons not to attend one of the elective classes required of all sixth graders. This student appeared to be a reader and seemed to enjoy spending the class period browsing the shelves and reading whatever looked interesting.

One afternoon, a large group of friends apparently coordinated media center visits after lunch. The students came from different classes. This really unnerved Rosie. It could just be that they thought it would be a fun thing to try to pull off but it seemed that the students were trying to assert their right to be in the media center. I admired the work and thought they put into coordinating the stunt, which I referred to in my notes as a “mini flash mob” (McFedries, 2003). It also made me sad that a group of students coming to the media center could be thought of as a stunt.

## **Reality**

While hall passes have problems, they are believed to help keep control of students in the actual work life of adults in education (Commanday, 1994). They are believed to keep the environment safe. In a school with 750 students, it can be hard to imagine another way to keep an orderly and safe environment. Parents who entrust their children to the school “system” expect people in the system to keep track of their children. They expect the institution to have a method for keeping track. This is just one of the possible reasons for the use of hall passes and sign in policies.

The media center has a total capacity of about 80 people. Two adults can only realistically provide reader's advisory service and reference service to fewer than that in the amount of time allotted to one class. If every teacher in the school sent two students to the media center at the same time, the room and people would easily be overwhelmed. When classes are being held in the media center, having students browsing the shelves and studying can be distracting to the students in class. This would be true whether the media center was on flexible scheduling or on fixed scheduling.

### **Multi-Tasking**

The organization of the following sections might imply continuity to Eliza's work day that did not exist. I am able to impose a kind of continuity through looking back on my observations and listening to the interview. Eliza's work is often fragmented into five or ten minute chunks. She rarely has the chance to work through one project for a long period of time.

“It seems like you never complete anything, like I started on that inventory and it's like, I looked at it and thought, boy I'd like to get this done today, and I thought, this is just something I'm just going to have to keep on doing when I have time, then when it gets toward the end of May, it's gotta be done!” (Eliza).

While the school day facilitates continuity in certain kinds of essential work, it can also fragment the big projects and administrative-type work carried out by non-classroom teachers.

“A lot of things are like that. It seems like I work on them a little at a time and I'm okay with that. I know some people like to complete a task... I don't have a problem

with that, working on a lot of things at once, which I think you have to be able to do”  
(Eliza).

When I arrived at the school in mid-March, Eliza was finishing up her work with the Parent Teacher Student Association book fair. The portable book display carts were in the cafeteria waiting for the book fair company to pick them up. (Eliza told me later that the book fair was held in the cafeteria because the media center was being used for parent-teacher conferences.) Eliza still needed to pick out the books the school had earned for the media center and for the lit center. The parents who organized the book fair had set aside books from teacher wish lists, but Eliza needed to go through those, reflecting on what students are asking for, what teachers are asking for, and what might become popular soon, based on her knowledge from students and other media specialists. She was also finishing up plans to take students to a children's book festival at a nearby college, a trip they took the day after my first day on site. At the same time, Eliza was working on many other projects, both long term and short term, including the district-wide Book Group Day, a school Mythology Bee connected to a national book advertising campaign, two technology inventories, and committee work for multiple committees. In addition, she was working on collaborative projects with teachers and performing collection maintenance.

### **Book Group Day**

Book Group Day is an annual event in the school district where RMS is located. It was created by a media specialist who wanted to bring authors to the students. It has gone on for more than 15 years. For Book Group Day, *the district* arranges for *published authors and/or illustrators* to make presentations to fifth and sixth grade students who

have *qualified* to attend by participating in a school-level or class-level reading club. Each reading club organizer sets his or her requirements for students to be able to participate in Book Group Day. All but two of the district's public elementary and middle schools participated during the observation year, along with one private school. Eliza was not able to find out why one of the schools wasn't participating, but the other school did not participate because one of the teachers felt that Book Group Day was a recipe for getting boys into trouble.

Eliza was *in charge* of coordinating the event during this school year. As a representative of the district, she contacted the authors and illustrators to make the arrangements and negotiate fees and expenses. She discovered just a few weeks before the event that in order to be able to pay the authors and illustrators through the district, she had to have them set up as vendors in the district system. She needed the authors to fill out a W-9 form, which is a "Request for Taxpayer Identification and Certification." The form is a vehicle for the district to collect information about the person being paid, including whether the person is subject to backup withholding and whether the person is considered a U.S. person for federal tax purposes. The form implies that the money being paid to the vendor is being reported to the Internal Revenue Service as income, so is part of the taxing institution of the United States. The public library was paying for part of the expenses of one of the authors because they booked her to speak while she was in the state for the reading event. Eliza also needed to coordinate that process by sending an invoice to the public library.

One of the participants was a local teacher, so Eliza had less to do to arrange for his participation. Part of her work on BGD involved keeping in touch with media

specialists in the district. She had to regularly send them information about Book Group Day (in the words of institutional ethnography, “texts” for them to “activate”) and had to follow up on various tasks other media specialists had volunteered for.

For BGD, students can order t-shirts with a special logo on it. The logo is determined through a contest, in which students submit their designs and the media specialists decided which one they like best. The t-shirt is available in several bright colors. Each media specialist was responsible for handing out order forms, collecting them, and collecting the money. The shirts cost \$5. Some teachers decided to have all of the students order the same color and some decided to allow individual students to make the choice. It was up to the teachers whether the students would be allowed to make their own choices when it came to buying the t-shirt. Even this decision is under the control of adults. The media specialists were expected to fill out a spreadsheet on a networked district share drive with the colors and sizes they needed for their students. Eliza had to reset the spreadsheet at least once because someone had filled it out wrong.

While Eliza was coordinating the event, she was also one of the participating media specialists. The second week of April, she made announcements to all of the classes who came into the media center, telling students that they could order the t-shirts now. One reading teacher told her classes that “if you’re wondering if you qualify—if you were at the last meeting, you qualify. If you weren’t, you don’t.” Each media specialist or teacher, depending on who the reading club coordinator was at each school, set his or her own rules for student participation. Participation criteria at various schools included reading a certain number of books, included attending meetings, and creating projects based on books. The focus of the criteria was on visible, tangible, assessable

proof of having read and excluded those who do not read in a social way, who did not or could not attend meetings, or who do not have time or resources to make projects. The aim is to promote reading, but attending meetings and making projects are important in deciding whether a student is allowed to go to the event.

Each media specialist was responsible for deciding where the students would eat during the event, which was an all-day event on a college campus. The event was taking place after the end of the college's school year, so residential dining facilities would not be available. In addition, a large food facility that could normally handle thousands of students was closed for a multi-year renovation project. While Eliza was responsible for the 50 students from her own school who were attending, she also had to find out what kind of places were available for the rest of the almost 1100 students attending so their media specialists could decide how they would get fed. To do this, she made a list of restaurants on or near campus, based on her memory and the memories of those around her, looked up the phone numbers for the restaurants online, and called to find out how many people they could hold. She warned them to be prepared for the large groups of children who would be on campus that day. Then, she put together a document with information about the restaurants and how many people they could hold to send around to the media specialists. Two groups had already reserved a popular pizza place and Eliza was planning to take her 50 students to a café on campus that she did not mention to the other media specialists.

While preparing students, teachers, and media specialists for the event, Eliza also had to prepare the authors and illustrators. She arranged for food, transportation, and thank you gifts for the presenters. She delegated the arrangements for *author buddies*,

usually a retired media specialist who accompanied the author or illustrator for the day and introduced them at the beginning of their sessions. She also found media specialists who would take the authors to dinner. One media specialist wanted to bring some students to the dinner she was attending with a published young adult author whose book had been nominated for a state book award. Eliza contacted the author, who responded very enthusiastically at the idea.

While Eliza was managing all of the details for the BGD event for this year, she was thinking ahead to how the students at her own school would be funded next year. In March, weeks before the event, Eliza started writing a request for the Parent Teacher Student Association to provide some funding for next year's students. Before writing the proposal, though, she checked with the principal to find out whether it was a good idea. The principal informally brought up the idea of funding the reading club trips at a meeting with officers of the PTA. The principal reported back that the PTA liked the idea of helping to fund the event for students, but cautioned Eliza to also look at other sources of funding.

Book Group Day is hooked into many institutions for many different reasons. It is strongly hooked into the business of publishing. All of the invited authors and illustrators are published by well-known publishing companies. In some cases, representatives of the companies were involved in making the arrangements for the author/illustrator visits. The BGD organizers had to choose authors who were recognizable, but not too famous, since author fees for the very famous children's authors were too high for the district to be able to afford.

BGD was also hooked into the institution of higher education. The events took place on a college campus. Capacity limitations at the venues determined how Eliza would schedule the sessions. No group could be larger than 295 people because that is how many people the smallest venue could hold. She also had to work around the capacity of local food places and what she knew about the preferences of the teachers and media specialists. The scheduling of the event was also linked to the bus schedules, since the district was using the same buses that are used to get students to and from school. That meant the buses would not be able to pick up the middle school students, whose day starts 45 minutes before elementary school students, until after all of the elementary school students had been dropped off. This also meant the event would go until after all of the scheduled end of the day runs were over. In addition to the bus schedule, Eliza had to take into account book sales. The student bookstore on campus had agreed to sell copies of the authors' books and some other "recommended" titles, so Eliza needed to build time into every group's schedule to visit the bookstore. She knew from past experience that there was tension around this since no group wanted to go first. There was also one media specialist who would not take any of her students to the bookstore sales because she felt that was unfair to students who could not afford books. This media specialist would buy 100 copies of one author's books to give to the students at the end of the year.

Eliza was shifting and adjusting schedules up until the day the program information was due. The program was being printed on campus and at the last minute, she got a call about the student illustration on the cover. The illustration was the same one that was on the t-shirts. The university printer needed a "release" on the artwork—

permission to print the student's name and school. That meant Eliza had to contact the parents quickly and get their permission. Fortunately, the winning student was one of her former students from the elementary school and she knew his parents, so she was able to get the permission in about a day.

## **Mythology Bee**

The Mythology Bee was part of Disney/ Hyperion's publicity for the final book in a popular series of pre-teen novels about a young demi-god. The publisher sent out an email early in the school year inviting media specialists to hold a Mythology Bee in their schools. The publisher would provide the materials, including prizes, and the winner from each school would be entered in a drawing to win a trip to Greece. Eliza decided that it would be a fun contest for the students without tying her to something that would be expected every year from now on. She also knew the series was popular with the students at this school, reflecting the knowledge she gained from her work.

Eliza had already received her packet of information and was publicizing the Bee when I began my observations. When classes came into the media center, she told them about the pre-test and let the students choose whether they wanted to take it. To do this, she needed to negotiate with the reading teachers so she could use that time. This did not appear to be a big issue, since it seemed most classes used the media center time for browsing the shelves and reading.

Usually, only a handful of students in a class chose to take the test. However, one teacher decided all of the students on her team should take the test (although it was voluntary for the rest of the students in the school.) This meant Eliza and I had 150 "extra" tests to grade, some of which were filled out by students who had never read the

books and did not care about mythology at all. Those students showed their resistance to the test by filling in the names of sports stars and music stars for the gods. The students also had various different ways to identify themselves on their paper. Some students put numbers for which class they were in, some put core names, some put teachers' names. One student did not put any information on the paper.

The top scorers for each team would participate in the Bee itself, an after school event that would be held in the media center. Each participant would receive a button provided by the publisher. However, the publisher had not sent enough buttons in the packet, perhaps assuming that participating schools would not be as large as RMS. Eliza tried to contact the publisher, but district internet filters blocked the Mythology Bee website at some point in the late winter/ early spring. Since a request to unblock the site could take up to two weeks, she decided instead to send out a call for help to district librarians to find out if anyone had received a packet but was not participating. Another middle school librarian sent Eliza her entire packet. Eliza ended up doing the work associated with using the myth bee web site at home on her personal computer.

A lot of the work for arranging for prizes was carried out before I got to the school. The packet provided by the publisher includes a medallion for the winner and a chance to enter a raffle for a grand prize—a trip to Greece with the author. The school's winner would also receive a set of the books, paid for by the school's *corporate educational partner*, a local business that provides some funding for school activities. Shortly before the Bee itself, Eliza began to wonder whether she needed to provide refreshments for students and parents. Several of us were uncertain, so we asked Rosie, whose child had been in a bee before. Rosie gave an emphatic no.

A few weeks before the Bee, Eliza realized the author of the series was scheduled to attend the state school librarian conference three days before the Mythology Bee. For various reasons, Eliza was not able to attend the conference or the special meal where the author would be accepting a state reading award. She contacted another school librarian in the district and asked her to take the books and get them signed as a special treat for the winner. In this instance, she activated her network and her knowledge of the other media specialists in the area. She knew that this particular media specialist loved going to the conference and she already had a good relationship with this media specialist. She used inter-department mail to send the books to the media specialist and received them the same way after the conference.

In addition to arranging for the prizes, space, and publicity for the Bee, Eliza also had to arrange for someone to read the questions, someone to run the slide show, and people to judge the answers. She asked Sarah, the reading specialist, to read the questions, and asked several teachers whom she had a good relationship with help judge the answers.

We prepared for the Mythology Bee the afternoon of the bee. We spent time over the previous week trying to figure out how the seats should be arranged so that students can see the slides and the emcee and so parents can see the students and the slides. With a ceiling-mounted projector and a line of low book cases running through the middle of the room, the options were limited, but the group came up with a plan. The custodians and resource officer (a police officer assigned full-time to the school) came in to shift tables for the bee, which seemed to prompt some last-minute questions about details like whether the contestants should wear name tags and how they should be seated. Rosie

was worried the judges, who would have printouts of the list of contestants, would not know who the contestants were. When making the name list, Eliza put the students in alphabetical order by first name. Rosie convinced her to change it to last name. Eliza told me that sometimes she likes to use first names just because it is different.

The custodian brought in the portable public announcement system. She was the one who suggested that they use the microphone for asking the questions. Eliza had forgotten the portable public announcement system was available. The valuable input from people like custodians and resource officers, who see another view of the school, is often overlooked in the literature.

Eliza's work with the bee was not done when the bee was over. She then had to put the pictures on the school web site and send in the winning student's certificate to the publishing company to be entered in the raffle. The certificate needed the parent's signature and had to be turned in the following Tuesday. The winner took it home to get it signed, since his parents had not been able to make it to the Bee.

Once the final book was released, Eliza got it in the mail and gave it to the student as well, so he would have a complete set.

## **Standardized Testing**

An analysis of Eliza's involvement with the state standardized testing reveals volumes about the institution of education, the pressures her teacher colleagues are working under, the precarious position of students with special educational needs, and other elements of the ruling relations governing schools and librarians working in schools.

The annual State Standardized Test (SST) *window* fell into the observation period for this research. Eliza and the other educators who are not classroom teachers played a *normalizing* role in the SST. The non-classroom teachers carried out the accommodations that were intended to allow for the standardization of students with special educational needs. Instead of taking the test with their teams, the students identified as having special educational needs would take the exam in small groups or alone with the non classroom teachers supervising. Eliza was to act as one of those test supervisors for a student. Some of these students needed extra time to complete the tests, while others needed to have the questions read to them. They were completing the same tests as the rest of the students in their grades, but needed special accommodations.

Many of the actions taken to prepare for and carry out the SST reveal the priority placed on standardization. While Eliza and I were walking around to different rooms counting computers and other technology a few days before testing was due to begin, we came across a group of teachers sitting around a table in a team workroom, punching out the rulers and protractors students were required to use for their math tests from pre-printed card-stock produced by the test publishers. Ensuring standardization of the tools the students would use during the test was very important, important enough for teachers to spend their collaboration and preparation time punching out the paper tools.

There is a disjuncture between the formalized and standardized procedures of carrying out the SST testing and the casual ways of transmitting information about how to test the students. Eliza, Charlotte, and another specialist had tried to schedule a time for SST training a month earlier, but were unsuccessful. One day, Eliza mentioned that there was an SST training meeting the next day at 8 am. She did not know until another

one of the special teachers told her about it. As soon as Eliza found out about it, she needed to arrange with Rosie to have Rosie come in early so Eliza could go to the meeting, since she would be carrying out the testing for one or more students. Fortunately, Rosie would be able to come in early, since she would be leaving early the following day.

When Eliza was assigned the student she was to test, she discovered that the student was scheduled to test in a very small, stimulating, new-to-him environment. Although it probably made sense from an efficiency standpoint to place the student, who would be testing by himself, in one of the smaller rooms in the school, it was also a room designed for students who thrive on a stimulating environment, rather than a student who would be easily distracted in such an environment. The focus was on efficiently scheduling the student who could not test with the group, rather than choosing environments beneficial for the student. This can make sense from an institutional standpoint, if for no other reason than a lack of time for people to carefully weigh and consider the pros and cons of every room or group assignment, but from Eliza's standpoint, it was a bad choice. She successfully lobbied to be able to test the student in the media center.

At the SST training, an assistant principal (AP) handed out pink sheets (so called because they were printed on a pink sheet of paper) on which the teacher was to write the information about the accommodations provided to each child tested during each testing period. The AP also handed out the examiner's booklets for the students. The AP in charge of testing explained what the accommodations meant. Some students could have the questions read to them, while some could have their answers "scribed." The teacher

who was carrying out the accommodations would listen to the student's answer and hand-write it into a box in the test booklet. If the student was allowed to “word process,” then the student would type in the answer into a word processing program on the computer, the teacher would print it out, and then the teacher or student would hand-write the answer into the box in the booklet. In the case of students who were allowed to “word process” their answers, the spelling and grammar checkers would need to be turned off. This was important for Eliza to know, as she would be the person the teachers would ask to find out how to turn off the spelling and grammar checkers. It was also important for her to know as there was a possibility she would have to scribe for a student.

It was very important for scribes (and students taking the tests) to avoid writing outside the box because the computer wouldn't read the answer. In this way, the technology shaped the way the test was carried out. The teacher carrying out the accommodations was expected to ask the student's team specialist before offering to scribe for the student. Unless a student's accommodations include *paraphrase*, teachers cannot clarify test questions. They may only pronounce one word per sentence for students. If these tests are supposed to test knowledge and skills, but if the student does not understand the question, then the tests end up showing only whether the student understands the question.

Time is a major concern in state-required standardized testing. One teacher mentioned in the meeting that “our computer people said they would just put a timer on the Smart Board,” but this had been deemed unacceptable because the time would not be standardized. Two particular categories of time came up at the SST training meeting. The categories were *extended time* and *more than allotted time*. It was extremely

important that the teachers at the meeting, including Eliza, understand these concepts, in part because of the disciplinary issues surrounding the tests and the implications for the school and district. “Extended time” comes into play when students are taking the “strictly timed” sections of the test, which include one of the sections of Communication Arts and one section of math. “More than allotted time” applies to the other sessions of the test, which are not strictly timed. “More than allotted time” gives kids a chance to take a break, walk around, and return to testing. They can finish later in the day with their regular teacher.

The focus on standardization affects how teachers view students. One teacher expressed frustration in the meeting over the idea that if one student keeps going, all the others have to wait. Another teacher asked about students prone to crying and shutting down under pressure. One of the students she would be testing responded to pressure by “shutting down.” The institutional language to describe this student might be that the student “does not respond well to pressure,” but built into that description are assumptions about the appropriateness of the amount of pressure students face in timed tests. The description shifts responsibility for the situation to the student. Because other students are more able to hold up under the extreme pressure of standardized testing, the student who is not able to hold up is perceived as a problem. The role of the testing itself and the tactics surrounding the testing are not implicated in the student's inability to cope. The focus on standardizing students combined with the pressure on teachers to have students score *proficient* leads to a certain view of the non-standardizable students. Rather than encouraging a sympathetic view toward these students or a desire to support their unique learning needs, the system encourages a view of these students as obstacles

to the success of other students (and to the success of the teacher) (Booher-Jennings, 2005)

Up until the day of testing, Eliza was not sure whether the student she would be testing would actually be in school. This ties into the organization of knowledge about students. Eliza learned about students from teachers who came to the media center with their classes, from the special teachers, and from knowledge sources that are known to people in a work place, but not visible in the literature. The school resource officer (a police officer assigned to be at the school all day, every day) and the head maintenance person were both sources of information about students. From her various sources, Eliza learned that the student was on the edge of being suspended from school for ten days. She also knew the student was likely to respond poorly to the pressure of the standardized testing, especially in the areas in which the student was weaker.

On the day of the testing, a new set of questions came up. First, Eliza realized there was a conflict between the regular hall monitor duties and the duty of collecting students for the individual or small-group tests. Then, she had questions about whether the student would be allowed to start the second question early if he finishes the first early. She also wondered whether she would have to sit at the same table with him while he tested. Before the student arrived, Rosie and I chatted about SST and she talked about the “ticky-tacky” rules that get other schools in trouble. In my background as a news writer, I had seen stories about schools violating SST rules, and as a parent of a student who has taken these tests, I had seen the effect of the tests on a child. However, the full impact of these rules on everyone in the school is invisible to the public. It seemed unclear to the faculty and staff which of the rules were the ones that would get them in

trouble if they were not met exactly. The rules also left teachers powerless to help the students who had not been officially identified as needing help.

During the actual testing period, Eliza and I sat in the main room of the media center with the student. We were each at a separate table. Eliza worked on the Census of Technology, but she had also brought a book she wanted to read so she would know whether she wanted to recommend it to a student. I worked on notes about my observations. We needed to be very quiet. Rosie stayed in Eliza's office with the door closed, working on correcting records and copies for lit center books. The student began the test at 8:15. Even if the student finished the test early, no one was allowed to be in the halls before 10:15. When the student needed to use the restroom, Eliza had to accompany him down the hall and wait outside.

Eliza told me the next day's testing window would go until 9:45 am. She knew he would be more frustrated the next day because he prefers the subject of this day's test. The student's regular teacher told Eliza she could scribe for him if the answers don't come out. The teacher gave her a performance report to rate how the boy did. Eliza told the teacher, "He did awesome."

The following Monday, she told me about the Friday SST testing session, the one she had worried about. The student had been more agitated that day and seemed more on edge. He did fine during the testing, but after the testing, his teacher came in and told her she would not be having him any more—he got suspended for ten days. Eliza's interactions with the non-standard students are not as fraught with stress and tension that come from classroom power struggles or worries over whether the students will *perform*

well enough on the test. She can have an easier relationship with those students than classroom teachers can.

Immediately, the assistant principal in charge of the testing told Eliza she would be substituting for another examiner and testing a different student on Wednesday. Eliza told me she hoped that would not be the day that has all the lines in the testing booklet, because he will need a scribe. The teacher wrote her a thank-you email for agreeing to test the student, saying it would make things easier for the student (who had a good relationship with Eliza) and for the substitute. The teacher suggested in the email that the sub could do tasks for Eliza. She joked, “I don’t know. Could he catalog for me?” Although she was joking about cataloging, it was true that there were few media center tasks someone could just come in and do without some training. As Rosie pointed out on another day, “once mistakes are made, there’s a huge amount of time” that goes into fixing them.

During the SST test training, Eliza did not play a part in the “normal” cases. She was a proctor for the “special cases.” “The examination, surrounded by all its documentary techniques, makes each individual a 'case' [...] it is the individual as he may be described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality; and it is also the individual who has to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc” (Foucault, 1995 p. 191). Eliza carried out the “accommodations” the system attempts to allow to try to “normalize” each student and make him or her measurable and standardizable. While carrying out these accommodations, Eliza was “on call.” Except for the first student, she did not know whether she would be administering the test to

anyone on any given day. One Tuesday, we waited until about 8:20 before Eliza finally decided “I guess we’re off the hook.”

Like much of her other work, this work was not witnessed by many other adults in the school building. When the first student was suspended and Eliza suddenly had some available time, she spent the time weeding the collection, an activity often viewed with suspicion by non-library people and an activity that does not involve teaching contact with students. The teacher’s comment that perhaps the sub could do some tasks in the media center to make up for Eliza proctoring also emphasizes the invisibility of the work in the media center.

### **Ongoing Work**

The special events like the Book Group Day, Mythology Bee, and standardized tests are only a small part of Eliza’s work. The work associated with those events has to fit into a schedule already full of her media center work, collaboration, committees, work with technology, and the work of managing middle school students.

### ***“Getting Work Done”***

On Friday afternoons when there were large blocks of time with no students in the media center Eliza and Rosie would work on the collection. On one Friday, Eliza and the aide told me this was “a day for getting work done.” This comment struck me for how dramatically different it was from the Information Power (1998) version of school library work transmitted in the published literature. This comment also reveals ideas about what school library work is. Eliza told me later that they view this as time “to get OUR collection work done, and the rest of the time we are helping others so they can do their

work.” The supporting role of the school library workers in schools is sometimes not seen as work and is not appreciated in school library literature.

Eliza attempted to carry out smaller tasks throughout the week. This is the kind of library work that is invisible to others in the school building, yet the consequences of not carrying out this kind of work became visible to some in the school in connection with the lit center, as I will discuss further on.

### ***Collection Development***

By the time of year that I was observing in the media center, many of the decisions related to ordering new books had already been made. Eliza told me that it is a two week process to do the paperwork to buy a book with district money. She acquires books through the book fair, since the school gets a percentage of sales. They get twice as much if they choose to use it as credit for book purchases. Some of the book fair credit goes toward buying sets of popular fiction or non-fiction books for the lit center, but much of it goes toward buying books for the media center collection. These tended to be multiple copies of less expensive current best-sellers. Teachers make wish-lists, so the PTA people who ran the book fair set aside the books from those wish-lists so Eliza could make the final decision.

While Eliza was looking through the books, the person in charge of the book fair, who was both a parent and a representative of the commercial book fair company, gave some input about the popularity of certain titles. Some of the titles were by authors who are popular with adults and some titles were the type that get purchased as whole class

reads or lit center sets. A book's sales statistics might not always reflect whether students will choose to read it for fun.

After Eliza selected the books, we took them back to the media center so Rosie could evaluate them. Eliza told me that Rosie's tastes in books were more conservative than hers. We set up the books on one of the square tables near the check-out counter and Rosie came over to look through them. She went back and forth between the table and the check-out counter to see how many copies of each book that the media center owned already. When she saw the three books from a popular series featuring African-American characters, she said they needed those and that some were probably missing. Eliza said those go missing a lot.

She also placed an order with the Junior Library Guild at the beginning of the year. Library Guild books are chosen by workers at the Library Guild, who select books in categories chosen by Eliza at the beginning of the school year. She made this decision because of budget worries. She knew that if she committed to the Library Guild plan at the beginning of the year, there would be at least a few new books for the students each month.

Other collection development decisions are made deliberately or inadvertently by others. For example, the media center buys multiple copies of books on the two state award reading lists aimed at young people between the grades of five and nine. The students at RMS fall right at the older range of one of the lists and at the younger range of the other list, so they are eligible to vote on both lists. They are also required to have read a certain number of books on the list in order to be allowed to vote. This means that there need to be enough copies for most students to have a chance to read them before the

voting period. Not only can this end up being expensive in up-front costs for the schools, it also has an effect on shelving, space, and weeding. The first few weeks I was observing at the school, I noticed stacks of paper boxes in Eliza's office. When I had the chance to ask her what they were, she told me they were excess award nominees from previous years. Some were excess copies of books that students were still reading, but others were titles that no one was checking out any more. The school was going to donate the books to one of the new schools being built in the district.

Another set of tasks is activated when the school receives new books. In order for the book to be available to students, they must be added to the catalog. The district has one media specialist who does all of the cataloging for the district media centers. The rest of the media specialists are not supposed to add records for new titles to the catalog, so Eliza sometimes has to wait until there is a record for a book before she can add copy information for the copy/copies at RMS and make it available to students.

First, the books must be protected with Mylar or book tape on vulnerable spots, depending on whether the book in question is a hard cover or a paperback. Rosie covers books herself. They used to have the district cover and protect the book, but Eliza and Rosie found it was faster to order the materials for the media center and do the book covering “in house.” This meant they could provide the books to the students more quickly. The principal gave her the okay to buy the materials.

Once books are available to students, it is inevitable that they will eventually get damaged. It can be a challenge to get the students to admit to having damaged a book. Sometimes, the students slip them into the return slot without saying anything or sometimes the damaged books are left in other areas of the school, such as the bathroom.

When a student does return a damaged book, sometimes Rosie will give him a “RRKS ribbon” for “being responsible” and “bringing it back so it can be fixed right.” Most of the book repair was done by the aide. Rosie keeps a box behind the circulation desk for books that are returned damaged. Although she spent time every day repairing books, newly damaged books arrived almost each day. A book that needs repair is “checked out” in the circulation system to the “book hospital.” Book repair is one of the tasks associated with librarianship that does not seem to have a formal mechanism for transmitting information. On a small budget, the school cannot afford book repair tools like presses to hold books in shape while glue dries, so Rosie came up with a technique using rubber bands to stabilize the books. When I asked Rosie how she learned book repair, she told me she had to “just figure it out.”

When students want to check out books, they first must gain access to the media center. Some of the issues surrounding access to the media center were discussed earlier, so here, I will focus on the work of the media specialist, aide, and student in connection with checking out books.

### ***The catalog***

I noticed that students at this middle school tended to browse the shelves to find what they wanted to read, rather than use the online catalog. I did not realize why they chose to look for books this way until nearly the end of the observation period. The media center does not have a computer dedicated to the catalog, so students who want to look up a book in the catalog have to sign in with their user names and passwords to use the catalog. The technology providing access to the intellectual content of the catalog was also acting as a barrier to student access.

I noticed this for two reasons-- first, in other libraries I had observed, students seemed to go to the catalog first. Second, excessive browsing is subtly discouraged. This might lead students who have browsed “too long” to just grab any book and check out, rather than to find just the right book. This also limits their ability to experiment with the catalog or to spend time browsing the stacks.

The commercial program that all of the school libraries in the district use for their online catalog offered a free trial of an add-on program that displays a graphic of the cover of a book and gives extra information in its record. As a super-user, Eliza helped other media centers get their access to this free trial. Several elementary schools did not have access to the trial. When Eliza called the company, she discovered the company did not have updated contact information for the media centers that did not have the free trial. She had to get a list of the email addresses of the affected teachers and send them to the company so everyone could get access to the trial. Although this add-on was intended for younger students, the only schools in the district that had it before the trial were the high schools, because, as Eliza said, “we wanted books instead.” At the time, the budget did not let them have both.

Eliza was enthusiastic about the add-on and the possibilities it could have for giving students more information about books before they go to the shelves, but other media center workers were worried about the potential for abuse. The software also includes a summary of the book and a list of characters in a pop-up window, so the media center aide and a media specialist in another school voiced concerns to Eliza and me that the information would be used to cheat on book reports. This reflected the systemic lack of trust in students.

The online catalog becomes a text that is activated when a student wants to check out a book. When students came to the desk to check out books, the first thing they usually said was their student number. Eliza told me about some of the time pressures the students had in elementary school when it came to library lesson time. She described having “30 minutes to check out a class of 32 kids and do whatever else they had to do in that time-- they know they've gotta get in line, get their business done, and move on.” Students had to learn the most efficient way to “get their business done” in the media center.

The media center workers enter the student’s number into the computer and refer to the student's record, a digital representation of the actual student standing before them, to determine whether the student is entitled to check out a book. If the record tells them the student has an *overdue* book, they activate that text by telling the student to return the book before being allowed to check out another. *Overdue* is a construct that emerged from the desire to make books available to as many people as possible, which is sometimes expressed in this media center as a desire to teach children how to share, or how to use resources in a way that is *fair* to others. The current activation of the circulation record essentially divides students into two groups—those who do not have overdue books and those who do.

Students may have up to four books checked out at one time. Books that are checked out from the lit center as part of a teacher's assignment *count* against the four books most students are allowed to have checked out at once. Students from one team were required by two different teachers to check out two different lit center books at the same time, leaving them only two books of their own choice to check out. The check-out

period for the lit center books is six weeks, and they will likely be expected to keep the book out for the period of time that the teacher is teaching from the lit center book. The lit center has books at a variety of reading levels and teachers can use them for whole class or small group exercises.

In one media center we visited, the media specialist decided whether students were capable of reading certain books (especially popular ones) before allowing them to check the books out. These policies do not come from a desire to stop students from reading, but they take away ownership of reading choices from students. Their library use is dependent on school requirements. It seems the idea of leaving only two books up to a student's choice is not infringing on their reading because adults sometimes question whether a young person can read two books in one night or one weekend.

The State Standardized Test affected student access to books. Some students would not have media center time before the test, so if they finished early and needed to read quietly, they would have to use something they already had and had likely already read. Teachers who had media center time right before the testing period were happy because it meant their students would have new books.

If a student wanted to check out a book that was not available, Rosie or Eliza would ask the student if he or she wanted to put the book “on hold.” Except for a few very enthusiastic users who had several books on hold at any given time, students did not seem to initiate the process of putting books on hold. Putting the book on hold required Rosie or Eliza to pull up the student’s record, then find the book’s record, then put the book on hold through the student’s record. When a book that was on hold comes in, the

system put up an alert message to let the person checking in the book know that someone else had the book on hold.

*Processing holds* involves checking the student record to see if student has out other new books, popular series, or overdue books and then deciding whether the student gets the book. While the literature would not acknowledge it, this process is not objective. A student will almost always get the book if he or she has no overdues and has no other new books or popular series. However, there are occasional situations (such as with the newest Percy Jackson book) when a student is known by the workers to be destructive, such as the young man who tore the protective tape off books and returned several damaged books during the short period of time I was observing. The media center workers preferred to let more responsible students have the books first.

The workers make multiple decisions in what looks like a simple process: get yellow sheet, fill out, and take to office and put in team leader's box. Earlier in the school year, they had to remind teachers to give the yellow sheets to the students in a timely manner-- they had to remind teachers of the teacher's work in connection with the hold system. Rosie or Eliza occasionally hold books at the desk if the student's team is expected in that day, which involves coordinating their activities with the school schedule. The mental work of this coordination happened almost instantaneously. I rarely saw them refer to the printed calendar to determine whether a student would be in. In a sense, they had internalized the texts governing their work.

A regular feature of Eliza's work is the process of retrieving overdue books. In some ways, a "due date" and the concept of "overdue" are constructs connected to the idea of providing the materials to as many people as possible. At RMS, privileges were

generally blocked to students who had books due. Extensions were rarely granted and tended to incorporate knowledge about individual students. Generally, the process of retrieving overdue books started with telling students that they had books due. This process was usually activated when the student came to the desk to try to check out a book. When Rosie or Eliza saw that a student had an overdue book, or a book due on the current day, they would stop the check-out process and tell the student about the overdue book. Students who had left the book in their classroom or locker were allowed to take a locker pass to go find the book. Although the motives of students in the hall are not considered trustworthy, the faith placed in the power of the pass to keep a student in line seemed almost unwavering.

The next step in retrieving overdue books is for Eliza or Rosie to print out a list of overdue books by team. Usually, the team reading teacher would request the list in order to help remind students to turn in the books (and possibly to check on what the students are reading, although that motive was not stated during my observations.) Once books were overdue by 30 days or more, Eliza would send overdue notices to parents or guardians. This work hooked into the work of others and revealed some weaknesses in other systems, including the district's system of getting contact information for parents/guardians.

Eliza does not have a set schedule for running the list of books that are so overdue that she needs to get in touch with parents or guardians. When she has the list, she checks the previous list to see if she has "keyed in" email addresses for parents or guardians. Email contact information has to be hand-keyed into the student's record. To get email addresses, Eliza has to go to the district-wide student record management

software, which was on the network, and find the students' account and then find their guardian info. She then cuts and pastes the email into the student's circulation account. Once she has checked that, she highlights overdues from other schools in blue. Some students have overdue books on their records from their elementary school days, while others move between the three middle schools and occasionally have overdues. She does not send overdue notices to parents unless the students have overdues from RMS. There are enough problems with retrieving overdue books from students who go between the schools regularly that Eliza has had to work out a system for dealing with the issues.

On this day in May, Eliza immediately noticed unusual things about the list she was looking at. She told me one girl must have moved, but now she wondered if that girl had moved back. She pointed out another student whose family moved to Sedalia with four books. She said she knows which parents will "throw a fit" and which parents are "irresponsible." This knowledge partially comes from her experiences through the year, her previous experiences, and Rosie's work experiences, but the way of viewing the parents is also shaped by ideas of the proper work of parents in connection with the schooling of their children.

Eliza mentioned to me that cell phones have changed her ability to get a hold of parents even after they have moved. She says that didn't happen years ago, "not that it will do any good." While attempting to contact parents on the phone, Eliza talked out her thought process. She did not appear optimistic about the chances of getting the books back. "This one-- his dad says he is a mess and he doesn't know what to do with him." "This girl has no one to help her." She gets a disconnected line. "They don't have enough money to pay for the book if they don't have enough money to pay for their

phone.” “Temporarily out of service” “Not accepting calls.” “This girl, I don’t think we’re ever going to get this back.” She is familiar with the families of several of these students and knows the situations they are in. Work in education sometimes brings that kind of knowledge about other people, which can be a very heavy weight. Eliza’s comments are about more than just the chances of getting the books back. She knows that some students face major struggles and feels sympathetic to them and their families.

She suspects some parents or guardians have given a fake number because they don’t have a phone. School officials make parents put something down in the space meant for phone numbers. Although the intent of the form is to provide a means for school workers to contact parents and guardians, the emphasis of the work of the parents in relation to the form shifted to the work of filling out the form “correctly,” which means filling in all of the boxes, whether or not the information is true.

After several messages, Eliza dials a number and gets a real person on the phone. She tells the person on the other end that “we’re hoping you can help her find the books and return them.” She gives the title of the book and the cost. After making a few calls, Eliza checks her email. She has gotten a screen full of error emails and bounce emails.

Media specialists face challenges in retrieving materials. Students move, students become homeless, parents get divorced, meaning students will live in two or more houses. The living situations of students become *problems* for a system designed for a stable, non-transient, two-parent family type. During the observation period it seemed like most of Eliza's interactions with the family members of students were related to trying to retrieve overdue books. It appeared that once retrieving books got to the stage of making phone calls to parents, the chances of getting the books back were low. How

might these kinds of interactions shape Eliza's views of the parents of the students in the school? How might these interactions shape the parents' view of Eliza and the media center?

Retrieving overdue books from teachers is another issue that media specialists talk about quietly but don't always address in formal ways. Eliza told me she does not have a big problem with teachers having books out too long, but she told me about a time when she wanted to be helpful, so she sent an informative email to teachers letting them know what they have out. "Too many of them freaked out" and she felt bad, so she does not do that any more.

Then there was the issue of missing books. Books that simply were not there, but were not checked out. Usually, Rosie or I would find them while shelving books or shelf-reading, which were some tasks I carried out in order to be less of a burden to Eliza and Rosie. We agreed that students probably changed their minds about checking out the books and left them wherever the student happened to be. Sometimes, missing books would turn up while they were being checked in. There were two types of missing books. One type was the book we knew was in the media center last week (because one of us shelved it) but no one can find it this week. Usually, it seemed that these books were eventually returned, perhaps because a student forgot to check it out (this media center does not have chips in the books or a security system) or perhaps because a student really wanted to read the book but knew he or she was not able to check out books. The other type of missing book was the type that turns up missing during an official inventory. Since an inventory had been carried out in January, there were hundreds of books marked as missing in the catalog. When those books are turned in and scanned, the catalog puts

up a message saying that the book had been marked missing. That means Rosie has to check the missing book printouts and mark off that the book has been returned. Rosie told me one day “it's like a little mystery every day,” never knowing if a book would be marked as missing.

While most people understand that one does not take books out of the media center without checking it out, it seemed that some teachers viewed the lit center in a different light. Although the lit center's collection is included in the catalog and the circulation is supposed to be managed in the media center, one issue is that teachers will take sets out of the lit center without checking them out. This is a problem when it comes to keeping track of the books, but it might be an even bigger problem when it comes to keeping track of which resources are used and which resources are not. In at least one case, a teacher brought a group of students to the lit center to get some “tubs” of books. Charlotte reminded the teacher to check the books out, but the teacher gave the tubs to the students and had them carry the books to the classroom. When the students asked about checking the books out, the teacher told them “not to worry about it.”

In some cases, teachers were very clear that their concern was for their own students and that if a policy did not affect their students, they might not pay attention to it. At the same time, though, they would get frustrated if they could not find a lit center item they wanted to use for their own classes. Figuring out how to help people understand that by checking out items, they were making it easier to know where the items were was a delicate part of Eliza's work producing texts, as will be discussed later.

## **Collaboration**

“[Collaboration has] been something we've really tried to push” (Eliza).

Collaboration is a subject of great concern in school library literature. “The goal for twenty-first century school librarianship in the United States and abroad has shifted toward more active involvement of librarians in student learning through teacher and librarian collaboration” (Montiel-Overall, 2008, p. 145). There seems to be a tension among the “ideals” represented in library literature, the invisible media center in school, and the realities of scheduling and school culture.

Much like other aspects of school library work, collaboration is shaped by relations beyond the influence of the media specialist. The school environment is complex, and while media specialists can have a wider view of what is going on with students and teachers than many other teachers in the school have due to their narrower focus on their own students, media specialists can also miss out on decisions made during team planning sessions-- which happen during the school day, when the media specialist is busy with classes.

As the catalyst for collaboration, the library media specialist initiates collaborative efforts that are focused on meeting the learning needs of students, both within and beyond the library media center. Working to establish links not only between the library media program and individual teachers but among the teachers themselves, the library media specialist encourages a culture of collaboration throughout the school (AASL, 1998, p. 51).

In a school culture that values feeling like a *family*, as RMS represents itself in print, collaboration can lead to unsettling conflict. “Fostering a culture of collaboration within a teacher professional community may spark conflict. Communities are often born

in conflict because they demand substantial change in school norms and practices...” (Achinstein, 2002 p. 425). Managing these conflicts is an immense responsibility for a media specialist to take on without specialized training and experience in facilitating collaboration and handling conflict. Media specialists who want to take on this catalyst role might find that some teachers avoid collaboration in part because they dislike conflict.

### **Library Lessons**

When I asked Eliza about collaboration in the semi-structured interview, the first thing she mentioned was a story about another media specialist who had worked in three different levels. First, she taught elementary school students and she felt that she did a good job teaching library skills. Then she went to a high school, where it seemed like none of the students had library skills. She believed that it was because they had had bad media specialists in their earlier years. Then, she went to a middle school level, where she saw students she personally had taught in the elementary years. Many of them had no idea what to do. That was when she figured out that students remembered their lessons better if they were taught in connection with their school work. This story shows how Eliza views her role in collaboration at this point in time: to help teachers teach information literacy and library skills.

During some of the scheduled class visits to the media center, Eliza teaches a library or information-literacy lesson. She acquired a 12-week lesson plan from the previous media specialist, but decided to take those lessons and try to apply them to content areas. Her goal was to align them with what the teacher was teaching. If she could get information from the teacher about what the class is working on, she ties the

lesson into their work. Early in the year, she was able to meet with some teachers to decide when each team would benefit most from each lesson. She was more successful collaborating with some teams than with others. Some teachers were “a closed door” when Eliza approached them with a certain lesson because the teachers told her they “did that all the time.” Others, though, were more open to collaborating with Eliza on incorporating library lessons in content areas.

### **Evidence of teaching-related collaboration at this site**

When we talked about collaboration in the interview, Eliza focused on the resources available in the media center and how she helped teachers teach students about those resources. “It was talking to them and asking them, hey do you know about this, how can I help you with it?”

Incidents of collaboration among teachers outside the media center were invisible to me as a participant-observer because of my location within the media center. I saw no evidence of collaboration. However, that does not mean collaboration does not happen on this site. This might indicate that some of the collaborative work of the school can be invisible to a newer school librarian. Some collaborative projects are made visible with artifacts after the projects are over. The school has displays in every hall, which show student work or which promote aspects of the school's curriculum or activities.

During the observation period, I participated in two collaborative projects involving the media specialist and reading teachers. The planning of the collaborative work took place somewhat spontaneously while the reading teachers were in the library with their classes. For one project, students created short videos about books on an upcoming book award nominee list, to encourage other students to read the books. For

the other project, students wrote short reviews to be added to the school catalog. Eliza's main function on these projects appeared to be technological, providing access to catalog functions, and helping students learn how to use movie-making technology. However, she also helped refine the rubric used to rate the students' work. Also, because a teacher was absent one day, we helped students enter their reviews in the catalog.

### ***Online Catalog Reviews***

Kim was a reading teacher who brought her team's students to the media center on Fridays. She appeared to enjoy reading the same books as her students, even to the point of borrowing books from students. Every week, she chatted with Eliza and Rosie (and me) about the books she had read in the past week. She appeared to be a voracious reader and was very familiar with the young adult novels people her students' age were reading. In March, she came to Eliza about a way to use social networking for student book reviews. "She approached me and said, 'Hey, I want my kids to do something where it's publishable and they can see it on the Internet' or wherever and I gave her different ideas and say what do you want to do" They discussed three choices: creating a "blog" for students to post reviews to, using the district's online learning platform for students to post on, or using the review function in the district online catalog. The very fact that this function was available shaped this collaboration. It took them more than a week of discussion to decide that using the reviews function in the catalog would likely be the best way to make sure the students' reviews get read by other students, which was one of Kim's goals.

For this project, Eliza's input was primarily technological. The students used a standard review form previously created by Kim. Eliza was responsible for getting the

students access to post the reviews in the catalog. Although allowing users to enter reviews is a feature in the district's catalog/circulation software, none of the schools in the district had set up user groups that would be able to enter reviews. Eliza needed to get permission from the district technology people to set up another user group and had to decide how much access she wanted to give to Kim, who needed some way to check the reviews. Once she had made these decisions and gotten permission from the district library coordinator to create a new user group, we had to change the students' circulation records to show their new group. After Eliza ran a report to get all of the log-ins for all of the students on the team, she logged into one of the media center computers and showed me how to pull up a student's record and change the user type. It took about two hours to change the user types for all of the students on the team. Eliza had to run a report in the district's student record management system three different ways before she was able to get one that had the information she wanted without getting a lot of extra information.

On the day the students were due to enter their reviews into the school's circulation system, Kim was out and her students came to the media center with a substitute. The school was also holding a patriotic assembly at midday, so classes were shortened. Instead of coming in during their normal reading class, the students came in during their science time. It was not clear to me exactly why the schedule was changed on this day, although it was probably related to the patriotic assembly scheduled for that day. Eliza set up about 20 of the laptops from the mobile lab in the media center. The students used the laptops and eight of the media center's wired desktop computers. Eliza and I helped them log on and learn how to use their new access to the catalog. There

were some problems. Because the students were not coming in during their reading class, some of the students on the team who have a different reading teacher were not participating in the project. A few gamely participated, but some sat and read the Guinness Book of World Records.

One problem we did not anticipate was that some students selected books that were not owned by the media center. If the books were not in the database for this particular school, students could not enter reviews, even if another school in the district (and in the federated catalog) owned copies of the book. The few students affected by this problem quickly came up with different books to review.

Another issue we faced that morning was the substitute teacher's lack of attention to the class. She was ignoring the students unless they went directly to her to ask a question. Eliza and I walked around the room, watching for students who needed help. At one point, one of the media center people said "might as well send the sub home." The students got progressively more restless throughout the morning, which made it difficult for us to help troubleshoot the connectivity problems we had with the laptops. Most of the problems were quickly solved by swapping out a slow laptop for a different one, but the students had to be patient and try to log in several times. During the class time just before lunch, Eliza, Rosie, and I got nervous that the sub would not bring that class into the media center in time to do anything before they would have to go to lunch. They arrived, with three minutes to spare before leaving for lunch. When they returned to the media center from lunch, we then worried that they would not line up and leave in time for the assembly.

## ***Book Trailers***

“And with Mandy, we were just talking and she goes 'I know I should do technology, but it's just such a hassle and it scares me and I'm not comfortable with it,' and I said 'hey, I'll help you,' and I think she loved doing that project” (Eliza).

Mandy was a reading teacher who brought her classes to the media center on Thursdays. She wanted to incorporate technology in her teaching, but worried that it would be a hassle and that she would not know what to do. Eliza told her she would help her. The project planning had already started by the time I arrived at the school. Because this was their first time doing this project Mandy decided that only one core (about 25 students) would do the project this year. She chose the one she considered the *best*. The students would work in pairs and create book trailers (similar to movie trailers) like the ones on the book award nominee videos produced by the state school librarian association to encourage students to read the books and vote in the awards. Eliza set aside the new books on the nominee list as they arrived so the students in this class would have the first chance to read them. Once they decided to use the book award nominees, the selection of books was already determined by the relations surrounding the book awards. This includes being aware of what the nominees are, ordering the books, then processing them and setting them aside on a cart. These trailers were both a language arts/technology project for the students and an attempt to publicize book award nominees so more students can read them and vote in the contest. Every year, the process changes a bit, with the students required to read a certain number of books in order to be allowed to vote.

The students selected their partners and selected their books during their regular media center time with Mandy. Some of the students were not in class at the time and other students had overdue books, so they could not check out the books they needed. Eliza checked the books out to herself so no other students would check them out before students in this class had a chance to check them out.

In planning the work the students would do, Eliza looked online and found the forms for the storyboards. She found an educational technology resource online from which she could print out storyboard pages. On the team's day for coming to the media center, Mandy brought the class to the computer lab attached to the media center. Before the class came in, Eliza set up the teacher computer with a demo of the Photo Story software and a sample book trailer to show the students what the eventual goal was. She showed them a completed book trailer, pointed out the structure of the trailer, and pointed out necessary elements of the credits. Then, she handed out storyboard printouts. She set up a folder on the student share drive for the projects and the students asked her to write down the path for saving pictures.

The students immediately wanted to get on the computer and start making their trailers, but Mandy stopped them and told them they could not be on the computer until they filled out the storyboard “and show[ed] they've used their brain.” Eliza mentioned that the students could access graphics of the cover of the book through the catalog. Mandy told them “that's your first slide, the book cover.”

During the class session, Rosie came in to get Eliza. Someone from district building maintenance was here about installing a Smart Board screen in a classroom. Eliza had to step out and talk with him about taking measurements, cutting wood, and

staining it, along with plans to surplus a black board that was currently mounted in the classroom in question. As evidenced by Eliza being pulled out of Mandy's class to take care of the issue of mounting the Smart Board, her other work continues even while she is teaching.

Mandy discussed structure of the trailers, mood, and theme for the presentation. When Eliza came back, she typed up directions for saving the cover graphics from the catalog. Class time ran out and the students left. After the students were gone, Eliza and I talked about a girl who wanted to use music from a portable digital music player. I knew from past experience that she would likely have to burn the music onto a CD and then download it from the CD into the free audio software they would be using. This was before I discovered that the students did not have enough room on the district server space for everyone to be able to save their music.

The students worked on the book trailers the following week. Some students came to the media center on a pass to work on their trailers earlier in the week and the whole class worked on them during their media center time. Eliza mentioned to me that the students would probably need the computer lab again next week

Later, during a “teacher work day,” a day with no students on site, Eliza and I were walking around doing the technology inventory and popped into Mandy's classroom. We chatted a bit, then she showed us the rubric she and her students had created for evaluating the book trailers. She asked us for our input on the rubric. The following week, we helped her with it some more. When she had asked her students for their input, they pointed out that all of her categories were focused on the technical aspects of the project. Although I did not have a lot of interactions with Mandy, it was

clear from this project that she was open to collaboration, both with teachers and with students.

Both of these collaboration experiences started with teachers who wanted to use technology; one because she knew she “should” and the other because she wanted students to have something to share. Also, because Eliza is the go-between for technology issues, it seems teachers learned that she was the person to approach for ideas about using technology for learning. Both teachers also shared an enthusiasm for reading. They were actively engaged with Eliza and with their students during their time in the media center.

### *Gathering resources*

During the period of observation, several classroom teachers emailed Eliza and Rosie to ask them to pull books on a certain topic to check out to the teacher for use in the classroom. Although school library researchers consider this a low level of collaboration (Loertscher, 1988), the media specialist and aide play a valuable role at least twice. First, they have selected these resources in the first place, which is a role of the media specialist which is taken for granted. Second, they select these resources so the teacher does not have to. An unfortunate side effect of the checking out of all the books on certain topics was that once a student's interest was piqued, there were no resources left in the media center on that topic for their leisure reading. Two teachers taught units on diseases, causing students to come in looking for disease books. This effect is invisible to teachers.

## **Another form of collaboration: the Lit Center**

As mentioned earlier, Charlotte is a reading coach who was put in charge of the lit center this year. The lit center is a repository of sets of texts for classroom use. These texts include dictionaries that can be checked out to classroom teachers as sets for a period of six weeks, along with copies of fiction and trade non-fiction books for an entire class to read and work on together. All of the copies have barcodes and have records in the catalog, which is maintained by Eliza and Rosie. The responsibility of keeping track of the inventory is on the media specialist and aide, but Charlotte is responsible for making sure the resources in the lit center are useful and current. Charlotte is used to relying on the school librarian for help. Her collaborative relationship with school librarians began when she was a reading coach in elementary school. She “instigated” collaboration opportunities with the elementary school librarian and discovered the resources of that librarian “probably by accident,” when she noticed that her students did not have appropriate books for their reading sessions. First, she asked the librarian if it was okay for her to come to the library and check out with the students she coached. Eventually, Charlotte says, the librarian realized that she needed to do some instruction on choosing books that were interesting but not overwhelming and that she needed to watch Charlotte's students. (Note: in the interview, Charlotte consistently referred to the media specialist as a “librarian.”) Now, at RMS, she turned to the media specialist and aide to help her organize the resources in the lit center.

The traditional library work of school media specialists is often glossed over or dismissed in research related to school libraries, but during the period of my observations, I saw first-hand the importance of a theoretical understanding of

organization of information. During previous school years, the lit center had been run by reading specialists, who organized and cataloged the information while also teaching emerging readers. Because of district budget cuts, the media specialist took over maintenance of the catalog of the lit center at the beginning of the school year during which this observation took place. Eliza, Charlotte, and Rosie worked closely throughout the period of observation to organize the lit center and make it accessible for teachers. Most of this work was done on Fridays, “the day for getting work done.” In this collaboration, rather than adapting information literacy goals to content lessons, Eliza used her professional knowledge of organization and access of information to help organize “information” for a purpose different from the purpose of the media center. This type of library work is vital and should be recognized for its value to the teachers and the students.

Throughout the observation period, Eliza and Rosie worked regularly on updating book classification, correcting erroneous records, adding visual identifiers to the items, and eventually, reorganizing the physical collection. More than 700 copies of lit center books had been unaccounted for during an emergency inventory in January, which had to be carried out when the online catalog crashed and all of the records disappeared. Some of those books were likely unaccounted for because of the habit of some teachers of taking items from the lit center without checking them out.

One instructor suspected of taking lit center items without checking them out came into the media center one day about a book she needed. Rosie told her the media center did not have it. They discussed whether Rosie remembered having it and how much this instructor's students needed the resource. Rosie encouraged this instructor to

send an email to all of the language arts teachers in the school to ask if any of them have the resource. Rosie said several times that it was a recurring issue that affects everyone. Later, Rosie mentioned that the instructor sent out the email.

The differences in how a media center/library is organized and how a lit center could be organized were apparent early on in the observation period when Sarah, the literacy instructor who works at two schools, came in with a question about a fiction book that was written in verse. She asked whether it was considered poetry. Eliza was on the phone, so she asked me. I told her it was a novel written in verse, but she will end up classifying it as poetry for her purposes. Questions like that came up later when we were trying to determine the shelf order for the non-fiction books. Some of the books were arranged by title, some by author, and some by series. Because of the purpose of the lit center, to provide materials for reading teachers to use with classes, small groups, or individuals, and because of our experiences or assumptions related to how they look for materials, the group of us who were working on the organization decided to sort the non-fiction by general content area, using the school curriculum as a guide. Then the works would be sorted by title. We discussed using a method of organization like Dewey, but quickly realized “teachers don’t think in Dewey,” so such a system could turn out to be a barrier to the use of the sets. It seemed logical to us that teachers were more likely to look for non-fiction materials that were organized much like the *core curriculum* of the school. We also realized that although Rosie currently returns and shelves books for the lit center, the system needed to be simple and logical enough that someone who does not have library experience or a lot of time would be able to maintain the collection if necessary. Most of these decisions were made during a time when there was not a great

deal of certainty about who would have a job the following school year, so we did not know who would end up taking care of the lit center collection in the future.

In the early days of my observations, we talked about the dictionaries. The lit center has responsibility for multiple copies of reference books that teachers are going to be likely to have students refer to in the classroom. Sarah pointed out the dictionaries in the lit center and said she would ask teachers whether those were the only dictionaries in the building. She also told me that the blue ones were the only ones approved by the district. (Like many people, it appears she remembers or classifies books by the color of the cover.) At this point, they had only a partial idea of what resources the school had, because some teachers continued to take items without checking them out. Another problem was that it was hard for teachers to tell what kind of resources were available. This led to at least one unfortunate weeding incident, when a set of fiction war books which appeared completely unused, were donated to a reading program because of an apparent lack of interest. Students found the few copies that were left and began checking them out and recommending them to each other. Eliza and Rosie both regretted losing those books.

The reorganization work was not just intellectual. It also involved physically moving thousands of books. The merging of responsibility for the lit center collection helped with the lit center's space issues. Eliza and Charlotte transferred most of the titles that had just one or two copies to the media center collection across the hall. We moved books from shelves, sorted them, moved shelves, re-positioned shelves, and arranged tubs. This work was done by Charlotte, Eliza, Rosie, and me, with help one Friday afternoon from two students who were in the lit center for disciplinary reasons.

A lot of the work associated with maintaining the lit center collection was not done in the lit center. Rosie had an ongoing project of making sure the low-level readers were correctly marked on the physical book (with a colored sticker) and in the online catalog (with a code matching the color on the sticker). She carried tubs back and forth between the media center and the lit center. She changed records. She corrected spine labels, which appeared to have been assigned almost randomly. She knew it was difficult to correct the records of items when the items were out or to get an accurate picture of what the resources are when they are in use, but she also recognized that if it did not get done now, it might not get done. She had no extra contract time before and after the school year, unlike Eliza and Charlotte. At the end of my observation time the work of organizing the lit center was not done. Eliza and Charlotte planned to finish up that work and make decisions about the sorting of fiction during their contracted week once school was finished.

Others in the school seemed unaware of the importance of keeping track of resources, of knowing what was being used, of justifying the space resources took up on the shelf. In some ways, the better the librarian is, the more invisible his or her work is, but this invisibility comes at a cost. Not only is this work invisible in the school, it is invisible in school library literature.

### **Potential Barriers to collaboration at this site**

While on the site, I observed several potential barriers to collaboration that rarely seem to be taken into account in published research. Two major issues were scheduling and turnover. While these issues might be touched on in research, they play a major role in the daily work life of the media specialist.

In this middle school, with 750 students divided into six teams, with three different lunch periods (since the cafeteria cannot accommodate all of the students at the same time,) each team can be on a completely different schedule. Teaching tends to happen in isolation from other adults in the school building. While the team teaching scheme is designed to encourage collaboration among the teachers on the team, rigid and possibly incompatible schedules can make it difficult for faculty members outside the team to collaborate. Eliza and Rosie have a different schedule each day. Their schedule aligns with the team that is scheduled to use the media center that day. However, unlike the classroom teachers at the school, they do not have a collaborative planning time with teams. During the period of observation, collaboration with the teachers happened informally during the time the students were browsing or reading in the media center. Not every teacher visits the media center each time he or she is scheduled and some teachers are not as engaged with their class during that time as Kim and Mandy were. Fixed media center scheduling can also be another kind of barrier to collaboration. Although it gives students guaranteed time in the media center at least once a week, it also means Eliza generally needs to be in the media center during most class periods. The media center fixed scheduling is generally centered around the team's reading class, which might cause teachers of other content areas to believe that the media center supports reading, but is not available for collaboration with other types of literacy.

Turnover can be a major barrier to collaboration. One key to collaboration is developing a relationship with teachers, learning what they need, and even anticipating their needs. Moving disrupts those relationships. Although the school is designed around the idea that students will have the same teachers for their two years, there

appeared to be quite a bit of turnover and rumored turnover just during the two and a half months I was on site. Because this was Eliza's first year in this building, she had to get to know a whole new group of teachers before collaboration could happen smoothly. At the same time, there were hints of changes to come. One of the teachers involved in a collaborative project with Eliza was moving to a position teaching a different content area at the same school. While this might provide new opportunities for collaboration, if the school culture promotes the idea that media center visits are for reading teachers, she might not take advantage of collaboration opportunities. Meanwhile, the two assistant principals were leaving, meaning for the next school year teachers would have to adjust to new leadership styles and personalities. Also, the school was losing several literacy support staff members due to district budget cuts. In addition to two new administrators, the school would be gaining a small population of English-Language Learners in the following academic year, which would mean a change in teams and staffing to accommodate those students' needs.

Peppered through the notes I took during my participant-observation time are worries about who would still have a job next year. Some people knew they would not be coming back, but others were not sure of their status. Although they discussed these issues privately, when no students were around, when I saw them with students, they never indicated their vulnerable status.

### **Working with other media specialists**

Although school library writers focus on instructional collaboration, lesson and curriculum planning, and instruction, Eliza also works with other media specialists. One major example is the Book Group Day planning, but she also works with them on smaller

projects. She shares items from her media center with most of the other media specialists in the district, although she has the option to keep her catalog hidden from other schools. She likes the ability to borrow items from other libraries and says “I can’t expect to borrow from anyone else if I’m not going to share, too.” Some media specialists get a reputation for not returning items promptly, so Eliza knows not to share with them.

She also acts as a mentor to new media specialists in the district in the new mentor program. Eliza pointed out to me that the district new teacher mentor program assumes that the mentor is working in the same building as the person they mentor and will see them in the hallway. She and the other new media specialist mentor had to make special arrangements to meet with the people they mentor. During my observation time, she and the person she mentors made two visits to other media centers to watch how those media specialists run things.

## **Committees**

Eliza serves on multiple committees in the school building and the district. Everyone in the school is required to be on a committee. The list includes Team Leaders, Partners in Education, Building Technology, and several others. As the media specialist, she is required to be in charge of the Building Technology Committee. During the observation period, Eliza had to decide whether she needed to have a Building Tech Meeting. There used to be a District Technology Meeting every month, where the representatives would bring information back for the other people on the Building Technology Meeting. A district administrator decided “they” didn’t need them any more. Now, she rarely has anything to share with the committee. In early May, she commented that not having the district technology committee meant that people at the district office

did not keep them “in the loop” on what was going on. She was trying to find other ways to get the information she needed.

Eliza is also on the District Image Committee. The district image is an attempt to standardize all of the computers in district buildings, both in their appearance and in how the programs behave. Eliza decided to be on the district image committee because she has seen so many people having issues with the current image. Some of those problems included default printers and default settings for software programs. Eliza told me the focus on standardization is to make the machines easier to troubleshoot and to make it easier to provide equity.

Eliza was a super-user of the district online catalog software, which gave her more access and control than typical users have. She became a super-user during her first year as a media specialist, when everyone got an email about an upcoming upgrade to the district’s catalog and circulation software. The director of the district IT office asked for volunteers for a committee of super-users, who would be trained on the software. The group started with seven people, three of whom have since retired. They received three full days of training on the software, then each super-user trained the other media specialists at similar schools in the district. Now that the product is no longer new, Eliza and the other super-users mostly help train new media specialists and help with upgrades. The group also makes district-wide policy decisions about the software.

Eliza is also a New Media Specialist Mentor, realizing that district mentor programs are designed under the assumptions that the participants are teachers working in the same building. She had the choice of mentoring the media specialist who replaced her in her previous building or another new media specialist. She chose to mentor the

one who took her previous position at an elementary school media center, because she felt that she had more to offer to this person. Not only would she be able to help her navigate being a media specialist in the district, but she had specialized knowledge about the school. The new media specialist came to RMS several times to meet with Eliza and we went on several site visits with her so she could see how other media specialists in the district ran their media centers.

### **Calendars/ Scheduling**

Eliza is responsible for keeping track of scheduling for three computer areas and the wireless lab. The school building has two spaces referred to as “commons.” They are formerly open spaces that are now partially blocked off with portable cubicle walls. The commons have computers in them for teachers to use with their classes. The third space Eliza is responsible for scheduling is the computer lab attached to the media center. She is also responsible for scheduling and keeping track of the wireless computer lab, which is a cart that holds (and charges) 25 laptop computers and a wireless access point. The lab can be taken to different classrooms.

The previous media specialist used a system of clipboards to allow teachers to reserve computer labs. When Eliza started at this media center in the beginning of the year, she set up calendars in Novell GroupWise so teachers could see whether a room/lab/commons was available. Then they can send her an email to reserve the room. The email is a “text” that activates her work process for scheduling the computer work spaces. Eliza says she still has people coming in looking for the clipboards.

Another part of Eliza's technology related work is to give permissions to some people for some of the school calendars. When the new secretary came on, she needed to

be able to view and sometimes edit some of the calendars on the school network. Only the person who “owns” the calendar can grant access. Eliza granted access to the calendars that she owned, but she was also seen as the person to go to to get permission to access a calendar owned by another person. She got several emails about the issue of getting permission for this calendar, but was unable to either grant it or to get the owner to grant it, for some time. Even if another person is unresponsive, what is visible is Eliza's inability to get the permissions granted.

### **Publicity/ Website**

Eliza's work on the school web site got more attention from the principal during the observation period than anything else she did. Her work included taking pictures at assemblies, putting together slideshows, adding newsletters from the guidance office, and updating calendars. At a faculty meeting, she got public recognition from the principal for her work on the web site. The web site is a visible artifact of Eliza's work, although a close examination of the tasks associated with updating a web site might lead one to question how this work came to be assigned to the media specialist. Eliza told me that when she interviewed for the job, one of the key questions appeared to be whether she would be able to *take over* the web site. This is the kind of work a media specialist takes on in part because it is visible proof of work. However, unlike other work, which can be fragmented, much of the work of maintaining a web site requires a certain, continuous period of time. Eliza has to coordinate it with the other tasks she has so she can devote sufficient time to it.

## Technology

“We’re doing so much to try to get teachers to use technology, but there are all these barriers in place” (Eliza).

Teachers and media specialists are encouraged to look at ways to incorporate technology into their lessons (Cunningham & Gonzalez, 2009). National associations send out lists of social networking sites that have educational applications (AASL, 2009).

Acting as a technologist (rather than a technician) and a collaborator with teachers, the library media specialist plays a critical role in designing student experiences that focus on authentic learning, information literacy, and curricular mastery-- not simply on manipulating machinery(AASL, 1998 p. 54).

Teachers do not just rely on technology for lesson planning. They also must use it for the routine of the day. Student absences and tardies are entered into the computer. Communications that ten years ago might have come over the intercom or from a student carrying a note from the office are just as likely to arrive via email, with the expectation that the teacher is expected to check email regularly. Technology is such a pervasive part of a teacher's work life that any stumbling block or obstacle related to it creates problems that ripple beyond the lesson or goal that was not met due to the problem.

There are several issues in institutional relations related to technology. There are problems and barriers related to helping teachers use technology in teaching. The literature hints at some of the problems and barriers, such as restrictive district policies and unresponsive IT departments, but does not seem to examine the true impact of these barriers or how these barriers came to be (Hughes-Hassell & Hanson-Baldauf, 2008).

Survey research can indicate there is a problem, but cannot show the impact of the problem on the every day work life of teachers, students, and media specialists.

Eliza's work day seemed dominated by technology, in terms of the amount of time she spent working with it or trying to make it work as expected. Technology both smoothes the work day and disrupts it, even when it works properly. Eliza feels there are more technology issues at this school than at her previous school, maybe because there are far fewer classrooms, or maybe because there are so many new things this year.

Technology has changed library work in many ways over the years. The daily work of the RMS media center is dependent on technology working correctly. The media center catalog is online, so requires a working network. The phone system of the entire school is based on voice over internet protocol (VoIP.) Even the showing of videos is dependent on multiple technologies working smoothly.

From the 1960s until just a few years ago, libraries purchased videos and owned them. As long as the videos were in good repair and the school still had working machines on which to play them, the media center/school would have the right to show them and use them in class. However, now, much of the current audio-visual content available to the school is on a license/subscription model.

Some of the rooms at RMS still have VCRs and some teachers still use them. The media center has a very small collection of VHS tapes kept on a single shelf behind the circulation desk. One teacher wanted a video to go with a lesson she was teaching. Eliza remembered a video that she had used at her previous media center that she knew would be perfect for this teacher's lesson. She discovered that the media specialist after her had gotten rid of the videos. She found another school in the district that had the video and

asked for it over inter-library loan. She worried, though, about what would happen in the future to the content that is currently only available on VHS as libraries and schools get rid of tapes and machines.

With videos only available on the subscription/license model, in addition to teachers being vulnerable to losing content due to physical damage (machines breaking, power failure, etc), they are also vulnerable to losing content due to licenses running out, free trials running out, or content being removed for reasons unknown and unexplained to the subscribers. The literature dismisses the worries of teachers who are reluctant to keep trying new technologies. Eliza understands why teachers might be reluctant. Teachers get tired of having to come up with backup plans. “We had a trial on [an online video service]—we had a teacher who tested it all and found all these videos she was going to use one day—she came in the next day and it had been shut off and she couldn't use them and so it's like, why try that again?” Teachers “want to know that something's going to work.” “You can pull that overhead out and turn it on and it works.” Teachers do not have a lot of time with classes and “if you spend half the time just trying to get the lab to work, it's too frustrating and they just need that time to be teaching students.”

When it comes to technology use by teachers, Eliza and other media specialists have mixed goals. They like teachers to be comfortable with technology, but that creates some pressure on the media specialists to find new, interesting things for teachers to use:

It's changed over the years because of the instructional technology specialist and all the access to technology that [the district] has and all the in-services that we've offered... teachers are more independent with technology than they used to be, so it's almost like you see yourself really helping them and

working with them and they feel comfortable with it and they don't need your help any more. So you constantly have to reinvent what can I help them with, what kind of new thing can I show them that's really cool that they might like to do or that will enhance instruction (Eliza).

## **Communications**

### **Central IT Office**

Eliza was in constant contact with the central IT office. She mediated between building faculty and the district information technology division. She was the only person in the building with access to the work order database, so teachers and staff members had to contact her when technology needed to be fixed. Sometimes, Eliza was able to find solutions herself or refer them to the building IT specialist, who split his time between two schools each week. In some ways, she acted as a *buffer* between the teachers and the IT office, determining what the actual problem is and determining whether it is something that needs the attention of the central IT office workers, who have more access privileges than anyone in the school building. Rosie pointed out one day that Eliza spends a lot of her time coordinating work between other people.

### **VoIPhone**

VoIPhone (a pseudonym for a commercial company) is the district's phone system, which is based on a voice over internet protocol (VoIP). Eliza dealt regularly with issues with VoIPhone. There were at least two issues with VoIPhone. One had to do with trying to set up the computer access and accounts for the new full-time secretary and the other had to do with the way the system is set up to take over the computer when there is an incoming call.

When someone from one of the classrooms calls a work station equipped with VoIPhone, the room number pops up, but information about who is in the room is only available on other sources, such as a printed directory. It is possible to customize an electronic “phone book,” so individuals apparently can add the information about who is in the classrooms by hand. This is an individual thing, though. Some staff members just try to memorize room numbers or guess which “team” is calling based on the room number. During the observation period, the district IT people were reluctant to add information about room occupants to the district database.

As mentioned earlier, during my ten weeks at the school, the school secretary left and a new one took the job. The new secretary had been a part time employee of the district before taking the full time job. Immediately, her problems with VoIPhone began. In early April, Eliza put in a work order about the VoIPhone problem and sent in a form via inter-department mail so the new secretary could have access. Rosie said “we don't know what happens to the forms.”

When the new secretary took her job, another worker in the main office decided that this would be a good time to switch desks. The two desks were side-by-side, so it seemed like a simple thing to do. However, something happened and neither person had access to the correct VoIPhone database. When Chris investigated the problems, he discovered that VoIPhone “thought” it was on a different office worker’s old computer instead of the one she was on now. He did not know where the guys were who can fix it. Eliza says “if we could change this ourselves, we could do this ourselves,” showing her frustration with waiting for others to get to the technical problems.

The on-going VoIPhone problems created tension in the media center. Because of the ongoing problem with the VoIPhone database switching between the two computers in the main office, Rosie became nervous about going to the office to drop off and collect mail. On the second day of the VoIPhone problem, she came back from the office saying she “got blasted.” The workers in the office had questions about why the VoIPhone was not working, but Rosie could not answer those questions.

Later, Eliza and I were standing by the teacher professional literature section evaluating some of the titles when the principal came in. There was some small talk, then she asked Eliza if Chris is not getting the computer problem in the office straightened out “because he is not capable.” Rosie and I faded away a bit, but I continued to listen because of the way this interaction shows how Eliza's work is shaped. Eliza told her that there was something people at the main central IT office needed to do. It seemed that someone in the office believed that changing VoIPhone is a simple job that one person in the building should be able to do. The people in the office had the perception that Eliza and Chris should be able to fix any technical problem they have. One problem was that although they might have been able to fix technology problems in the past, the technology staff regularly change systems, programs, and protocols. This happened with Eliza's work with the web site; she was unable to log in, so she called the main office and found out the person in charge of web sites “just changed the passwords.” Chris is very dependent on the central IT office coming through, because he is the “face” of the department to the people who work in this school, and he is assigned blame when systems don't work correctly. This affects Eliza not just as his colleague, but as someone who depends on his technical ability to get her own work done.

It took a few days, but the VoIPhone issue was finally solved when someone from the central office got on and “did something.” Chris wished he could see the other side; he commented that he is only seeing half the puzzle. Like Eliza, he has some access to solve technological problems, but possibly not enough.

The other major way VoIPhone shaped the media center work was in the way it popped up on the computer screen when a call came in. The pop-up window would stop whatever the person using the computer was doing. While it was possible to “turn off” VoIPhone on a computer, as soon as someone called, it would turn on again. For someone working at the main desk in the media center, this can interrupt interactions with students and enforce a subtle message that whoever is on the phone is automatically more important than whoever is there in person.

## **The Mobile Lab**

“The biggest barriers teachers have is when they get something ready and then the technology doesn't work” (Eliza).

Eliza did not get visibly frustrated with technology problems with the exception of problems with the mobile computer lab. This is a large metal cart with 25 laptop computers and one wireless access point built in. It can be rolled to any classroom and plugged into a data port so all of the students can use the Internet without leaving the classroom. However, the mobile lab consistently had problems when more than eight students would try to log on at once. The computers would slow down dramatically, as all of the functions rely on the student being logged in with his or her district username and password.

One morning, we attempted to help a math teacher whose students were using the mobile lab to work on computer slide show presentations. After we left the classroom, Eliza expressed frustration to me about the amount of money spent on technology that does not reliably work: “We’re doing so much to try to get teachers to use technology, but there are all these barriers in place.” She felt there was a simple solution: to acquire one more mobile access point to put on the lab cart so more students could log on at the same time, especially in classrooms that were not near permanent access points that had been mounted throughout the school building. She was frustrated, however, because she felt that the district information technology people did not believe there was a problem. The system appears to privilege the view of people who are not currently in the building over those who are in the building experiencing the problem.

One of the days the mobile lab was acting up, we spent part of the morning in the classroom where the teacher was trying to use the lab. Someone from the central IT office came to check out the problem. Eliza told him that the lab had been like this all year, but he said he used it fine last year as a teacher. She asked if there had been another access point. He says yes, but that he used the one on the cart. I had wondered, but did not have the chance to ask whether the computers automatically search for a wireless point. It would seem that having another one nearby would give the computers another access point to find. The access point is connected to the wall by what appears to be a DSL cable.

There is a great deal of power in the work of a technology person/engineer. The problems the teachers and librarians were having with technology in their everyday work

life were sometimes not taken seriously by the computer/technology people, which affected the daily work of people at the school.

## **Safety and Security**

Just as the discourse of safety affects the amount of access students have to the physical location of the media center, the discourse of computer safety and security affects the amount of access and level of permissions that students and teachers have on the computers in the school building.

Decisions about technology in school buildings are often made elsewhere. During the time of my observation, most sites that had any kind of social networking enabled, including webmail sites, were blocked. The decision to block web sites is made by a commercial company that the district has outsourced to. By default, the blocking decisions are privileged; the media specialist or teacher who wants a web site unblocked must first make a request to the principal. When the request is approved by the principal, then a form goes to the centralized technology office, which then makes a decision about whether the site may be unblocked. Eliza told me of a student teacher from a university in another state whose request to have her campus webmail site unblocked while she was working at RMS was denied. During my observation period, I did not ask for or receive an account to log in to the school computer system, but I did have access to my own university email using my phone. In these times, it can be a burden to be blocked from email, especially if others are expecting regular contact during weekdays.

During the summer after my observations, the American Association of School Librarians sent out an email listing the 25 most useful websites for teaching (AASL, 2009). Most of those sites are blocked at the district I spent time in. Chris said one day

that a teacher at another middle school in the district was using Facebook for networking. It is now blocked. He said she should be using “Novell GroupWise,” which is the district-approved network software and that he couldn't understand why teachers would use Facebook to collaborate, rather than using the district networking software. Facebook was one of the websites on the AASL list.

Chris also told us that one person at the central IT office is considering locking down access permissions for faculty and staff using district computers. Chris had discovered that one technology teacher installed a program on her work computer that watches her browsing habits, for which she would be paid \$50 twice a year. This is an issue of student information confidentiality, since the spyware people have access to whatever this teacher sees. However, locking down access permissions would extend to not allowing teachers to customize their desktops in any way. Having worked with computers on which I was not even able to change the clock to reflect the correct time and date, I know how frustrating that level of lockdown could be to a professional.

### **Virtual Storage Space**

The schools in the district shared virtual storage space on shared drives. Students and teachers often misunderstood the share drive and how to log in so they would have access to their own files. One boy came into the media center (with a pass) for help because he had saved his project under “localuser” and now he could not log in. Eliza had to write an explanation of the problem in a note to the teacher, which she wrote on the student’s pass. When he left, she explained to me that the teacher did not understand how the wireless lab worked. Eliza said she would do wireless lab training at the beginning of the year.

One of the technology problems Eliza had to deal with was that students would run out of space on the share drive with just one multimedia project. The district won't let them have more space. Either the district does not have enough space or the district is not willing to give students more space. This is a barrier against the effective use of technology in teaching.

Students working on Eliza and Mandy's book trailer project came across a permissions problem. Because of the access level of student accounts, they are not able to *rip* music from CDs to use for their projects. They are allowed to download music from the web, from sites identified by Eliza, but then they face the problem of running out of space for their projects.

## **Technology Inventories**

Part of Eliza's work with technology involves keeping track of its physical location. She conducts inventories, gets involved when items are stolen, and is involved in decisions about where to put equipment in the portable classrooms during breaks (because of worries about theft.)

During my ten weeks at the school, Eliza had to conduct two different inventories of technology equipment in the school. The two inventories targeted different equipment and had different purposes. One was the Census of Technology, required by the state department of education, and the other was an inventory of technology for the district.

## **COT**

Data gathered in the Census of Technology are expected to help raise awareness of technology in schools and help inform public policy. What actually happens to the information after it is published on the state department of education web site is unclear.

While the information is available, the state does not make clear how it is used. The CoT is a multi-page document on which building technology contacts (media specialists) are to write down how many computers they have and what types of computers they are. There are two parts to the survey, a district-level survey and a building-level survey. Eliza was in charge of RMS's building-level survey, which looks at training, hardware, and Internet connectivity. The most time-consuming part of the survey seemed to be looking for the hardware. Eliza was only looking at machines with CPUs. Eliza had to get information about all computer hard-drives and any laptops and handhelds, and get information about the ages of the machines. The district had just changed the reporting of computer type from being based on speed to being based on age. Equipment is on a four-year replacement plan. Eliza believes that will change because of the budget situation.

Eliza decided to check each piece of equipment in the rooms, rather than relying on last year's inventory reports. The district inventory numbers were on silver stickers that were sometimes almost completely inaccessible. For at least two of the Smart Boards, the numbers were on the back of the wall-mounted screen. Stickers had been placed on the devices at the central IT office, which processes most of the computer equipment before the equipment comes to the schools, without apparent thought to who might need to look at the stickers. We had to take a Smart Board screen off of the wall to check the number.

The Census of Technology also tracks some online resources, specifically, two online databases and an online encyclopedia. Eliza was not sure why these particular resources are specified by name in the census. While Eliza was working on the Census of

Technology, two days before it was due, she wondered aloud to me why she put it off. I was able to understand immediately why she had put it off. Every moment of the day is filled. So many things get done “just in time,” not because of procrastination, but because there is simply a lot to do in the school media center.

Eliza had initially put a shared spreadsheet for the Census of Technology on the teacher share drive, but only one person could edit it at a time (so any changes someone else makes would not take effect.) The software did not show whether someone else is on the spreadsheet at the same time until the user tried to save the data. Few teachers tried entering their own information for the Census of Technology.

When Eliza was finished filling out the paper form for the Census of Technology, she told me she must have erased the sheet ten times. Then, she added up the totals again on a calculator “because that's what [the IT representative] is going to do.” She then made a copy for herself, faxed the form to the central office, and put it in inter-campus mail. At a meeting in early April, the district library coordinator told the media specialists that last year, all of the CoT reports had been wrong and had to be sent back.

While there is clearly a priority in the district on knowing the age of the hardware at the schools, the process of collecting the data and filling out the forms is time-consuming and can create a burden on the media specialist, especially when it is not clear what is actually done with the data.

## **District Inventory**

The other inventory was the district's inventory of valuable technology items. The inventories overlapped a little, but not enough that completing one would help with the other. This inventory was for insurance reasons, although Eliza believed the insurance

deductible was so high that if something were stolen, it probably would not be replaced. Eliza set up a spreadsheet on the share drive so teachers could do their own inventory and give her the information about their electronics. Just as some teams of students appear more cooperative than others, some teams of teachers were quicker about getting their inventory information entered in the share drive.

During the second week of April, Eliza opened the inventory spreadsheet to see how people were doing. “Everybody was working on it last week.” The previous week was the week that we were collecting information for the Census of Technology, so we were visibly carrying out the inventory. Our presence likely reminded teachers that they needed to do their inventory. None of the teachers on one team had started. No one in the office knew they had to do theirs, so Eliza said we would have to do it.

Keeping these two inventories straight was challenging for me and for the teachers. As we went around gathering information for the Census of Technology, teachers would give us guilty looks and apologize because they had not done their district inventory yet. We spent a teacher work day, a day when there are no students, going to the various classrooms and getting the inventory numbers off the technology items. This activity also gave us the chance to reclaim some equipment that some teachers were reluctant to return in a timely manner.

## **Systems**

Like teachers and administrators, Eliza depends on technology to carry out many of her daily work functions. The media center's catalog is online as part of a district federated catalog. Circulation is controlled by (people running) a computer system, bar-codes, and scanners. The district student database is in one system, while the school's

catalog and circulation information is in another system. The district uses a third system to move information from the district student database to the district's circulation database. The student information is transferred automatically. While the system seems to work for most of the students' information, there are a few whose information seems to fall through the cracks. For example, the circulation record of one student changes at least once a week to indicate that she attends a different middle school in the area, although she has been attending this school for the entire school year. Another student was added to the district student database during my observation time, but her information did not transfer into the circulation database. Eliza told me this system was an improvement over the previous system, in which media specialists had to type in all of the student information by hand.

“It's not bad enough that it's worse than what we had...” (Eliza).

While these issues created small problems that were relatively easy for Eliza to fix, a bigger problem was when the system would indicate that students who had moved away with books on their records were “inactive.” While it might seem logical to indicate that a student who is no longer in the district is inactive, this action creates problems if the students have books checked out. If Eliza got enough warning that someone was moving, she would sometimes be able to get the books back, but not always. An inactive record can be eligible for deletion, leaving the information about the books in a kind of limbo. The system's deletion process also didn't take into account that students can and do move between the schools. Eliza and the aide both spoke of situations where students leave with books on their records and are deleted, only to return to the same school. The systems are not designed to take into account the transience of

the student population, and so can cause inventory problems. What makes it most difficult for solving these problems is that they are not consistent. The problems are random and sporadic.

Eliza can ameliorate some of the problems caused by the transfer or non-transfer of information as a district super-user of the catalog database. She has a level of access that other users in the district do not have. She tries not to use that power too much, as she feels it would be unfair to media specialists in the district who do not have that power. “Most media specialists don't even have that option to move them so I try not to abuse my privilege” (Eliza). Becoming a super-user appeared to be one way she could negotiate the system, although when she became a super-user, she probably did not realize how that status would help her negotiate the system.

The students' records are supposed to be automatically shifted by the third program when they move between schools, but when teachers move between schools, the media specialist calls Eliza and asks her to move the teacher. That way, there are not multiple patron records for one teacher in several schools. The system is not set up to communicate information about teachers moving, just students “because they move all the time” (Eliza).

Checking the status of several students in the online circulation system is a regular part of the workday. This work appears to be carried out mostly by Rosie. This is a work process created by the technology systems in place.

## **Texts**

Part of Eliza's work as a media specialist is generating texts to activate the work of others. In addition to updating the school web page with information for students and

teachers, she also wrote segments of the school newsletter for parents and the staff newsletter. She gave herself a few days to work on the staff newsletter, not just because of the fragmented nature of her work but also because as she works on it, “all of these things come to me.” She wrote a segment about printing pdf files because “it keeps coming up.” It is very frustrating for teachers because the most effective way of printing on the school printers is to “print as image,” but that is not set as the default. That was one of the reasons she wanted to serve on the district image committee, because as the media specialist, she heard about what the teachers want in their technology. While she was thinking about issues teachers have with technology, she decided she should add in directions for using the search box on the default home page.

One of the more delicate reminders she had to write was the one reminding teachers to check out lit sets instead of just taking them. She said it was hard to come up with ways to word things without being negative. She decided to “run it by” Charlotte before sending it out.

For the email newsletter for parents, Eliza usually started by opening the text the previous media specialist had written for the same time the previous year. She also took suggestions from Rosie about what she should write about. We joked about putting in a warning about not touching books printed before 1986, because of a lead scare prompted by a reporter's questions to the district. More seriously, Rosie suggested that Eliza write about the Mythology Bee.

The texts, information, and reminders Eliza sent to teachers and parents can only show a very small amount of the information Eliza needs to know or readily access in order to do her work. She cannot overload the recipients of the information, but part of

her work remains invisible by necessity. Some invisibility of work is not necessarily a problem, except when decision-makers believe they can judge the work and value of the media specialist solely by the work that is visible to the public.

### **Building issues affecting school library work**

The construction and maintenance of school buildings is a kind of workplace knowledge that does not show up in published literature. Although RMS was built only a decade ago, the roof leaks and the building has water damage. Every time it rains, people place buckets everywhere in the halls and some classrooms, trying to catch the rain. One leaky spot was in the ceiling right above Eliza's desk. During heavy rains, she has to move her desk away from the spot to avoid damaging everything on the desk. (The layout of the room would prevent placing the desk on any other wall, since one wall has a sink/counter and the other two have tall, heavy storage cabinets.) The ceiling in the main part of the media center also leaks. One of the trashcans was so often used to catch water that I found myself reluctant to throw away my lunch trash in it one day. It turns out I was right to be reluctant, since only an hour later, we had to empty out the trash and move that trash can under the leak. The use of the trash can is the kind of workplace knowledge that does not show up in published literature, though it is also the kind of workplace knowledge that is not unique to schools and libraries. However, the conditions that caused the trash cans to be pressed into service as water catchers in a fairly new school are hooked into ideas about construction, funding, and community expectations for school buildings.

The portable classrooms also have maintenance problems. Students who normally meet in one of the portable classrooms had to meet elsewhere because of a smell. There

were animals living under the portable classroom, so someone from maintenance had put a trap under the classroom. The teacher said the smell happened suddenly, as if a trap made an animal mad. For one class period, they met in the media center. Then they met at one of the commons. Another group had to meet in the media center because there was no heat in their classroom. Portable classrooms are not unique in this fast-growing district, revealing ideas about growth and planning ahead.

## **The Future**

Throughout the period of observation, Eliza and Rosie did not know whether they would have jobs the following year. Eliza worried that district administrators would cut her job and keep the aide, or that they would cut the aide job and keep the media specialist. There is other uncertainty about the future. At one point, when Chris was in the media center chatting, Eliza and Rosie asked him to stay at RMS when “they try to move you” over the summer. The mobility of teachers and staff is an undercurrent throughout the months of observation.

The second week of May, two weeks before the end of school, Eliza received the team schedules for the following year. “I hope it’s good for us.” She and Rosie went over the schedule. This required an understanding of a complex system of scheduling. Each year, administrators generate six different schedules and then assign a schedule to each team. Eliza and Rosie feel it works best to schedule the team with electives in the afternoon to visit the media center on Fridays because that gives Eliza and Rosie Friday afternoons to clean up and prepare for the next week. The reading teacher whose team is currently scheduled to come in on Mondays will have the Friday schedule next year. Eliza and Rosie wonder if she will “go for” changing her media center day to Friday. It

can be a delicate negotiation for teachers who like their routines. (The teacher who had Friday media center visits this year is teaching a different subject next year.)

The school district is changing its scheme for allocating grades to buildings and Eliza recognizes that she might have to make some changes in how she does things to accommodate the larger range of grades. In addition, in the school year following this one, this school would be gaining about 20 students who do not speak English as their first language. The effects of these decisions were not yet clear at the time of the observations.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have detailed the work Eliza and Rosie carry out in the media center and how that work is shaped. I have shown how the work is hooked into the district information technology office, the publishing business, institutional conceptions of parents, and other forms of ruling relations. I have also shown how her work is made invisible to other people, both in the school building and out. I will now discuss some implications of these findings.

## Chapter 5 Conclusions

In this chapter, we return to the central problematic of the study: How is school library work socially organized? The central problematic emerged through my work in school libraries as an initial certification student. The institutional ethnography frame of inquiry has not been widely used to uncover social relations shaping and organizing school library work, but there is much to discover. By making power structures visible, the institutional ethnography frame of inquiry can give a school librarian a map for strengthening the library program.

The school library can equalize access for students from different backgrounds. It provides access to developmentally-appropriate materials that support the curriculum. It also provides materials to encourage young people to enjoy reading. The school library shapes expectations of young people for what a library is supposed to be, whether librarians and young people are aware of that. I maintain this vision of the school library steadfastly. We must think about what a school library is and why it is included in the school. We also must think about what messages we are sending to young people about libraries when it seems that we spend much of our time restricting their access to the media center.

In an apparently uncertain economic climate, where libraries face closure due to state and city budget problems (Greenwood, 2009; Ewbank, 2008; "Trenton Library," 2008) the existence of a library in the school becomes even more vital, both to provide access to information to young people and to keep the ideal of the library present in their experience. The visibility of the library and the librarian is also vital. People who make

decisions about funding need to know who the librarian is and what he or she contributes. The librarian I observed contributed a great deal to her school environment, collaborated with teachers, solved technological problems, and created interesting programs and lessons for the students at her school. The fact that her district valued the idea of the library enough that she was able to have a full-time aide allowed her to assist the teachers and contribute to the education of the students. At the same time, though, institutional decisions shaped the work to include the work of surveillance and at times, the work of restricting access to the media center. Institutional decisions also limited access by students and teachers to educational technology featured prominently in school library publications.

### **On Institutional Ethnography**

Institutional ethnography is a sociology for people (Smith, 2005). It is a frame of inquiry for people to examine their work and how it is shaped. It is not objective because people are not objects and the coordination of their life is not objective. Viewing school library work through the institutional ethnography frame of reference revealed how powerless media specialists and teachers can be—how the structures that are supposed to make the non-instructional and disciplinary parts of their job easier consume their time and affect their interactions with students. While I have talked with media specialists who have noticed and commented on parts of these structures, few have the luxury I had of examining and questioning these structures. The work day of a school media specialist can be a whirlwind, so working media specialists do not have a lot of time for examination of the work.

What is the purpose of examining the work? When one recognizes the institutional relations governing the work, it can seem overwhelming to try to effect change. “The research won’t bring solutions without the political work, but the approach is meant to offer the kind of ‘map’ that could help those working politically to see what they are up against and where they might want to apply pressure” (DeVault, 2006 p. 295). Institutional ethnography shows people where the work is, especially the work that is not recognized in the official institutional discourse. With the knowledge of how the work is shaped, school librarians can get a clearer view of how to work within the institution to achieve the goals of librarianship: providing physical and intellectual access to information.

### **Reconsidering the Questions**

Now, I will return to the questions guiding my research and reconsider them in light of the findings. The questions were:

- How is school library work tied into institutional and ruling relations?
- How does the librarian understand the power structures of the institutions she works within?
- How does the librarian negotiate the power structures of the institutions she works within?
- How do these ruling relations express themselves in the work?

### **How is school library work tied into institutional and ruling relations?**

The school library media center is tied into institutional relations of school and education. The school librarian must follow school and district norms. She is aware of

the problems caused if everyone in the school does not follow the district or school-prescribed behavior expectations, for example, even when she is uncomfortable with parts of the systems. School library work is subject to team schedules, special events, and standardized testing. Eliza must be flexible and ready for last minute schedule changes, such as the calendar change just weeks before the school year was set to end. The work is also shaped by the previous experiences people in the school have had with libraries and librarians. Charlotte was overwhelmed by the amount of work she had to do to get the lit center organized, but partly because of her previous positive experiences with a school librarian, knew she could turn to Eliza and Rosie for help. Kim and Mandy both knew they could rely on Eliza to help them with the technology of their projects to broaden the experiences of the students.

### **How does the librarian understand and explain the power structures of the institutions she works within?**

One question I wanted to answer with this research had to do with Eliza's standpoint. She presented herself as a coordinator, a mediator, and an instructional support person in her priorities and the way she described her work. From the description of Fridays as the day for "getting OUR work done," though, it appears she sees herself in a supporting role related to other teachers. This role seems logical when one notes that the complicated schedule kept Eliza from being involved in team planning meetings. This role is also logical because Eliza was new to the school and was still building collaborative relationships with teachers.

Eliza understands the focus on standardization as a way to provide equity. However, as is clear in the observations, there is already a lack of equity in schools.

Every teacher is not the same and each “team” has characteristics that come from the combination of students and teachers on the team. Positive Behavior Support and other behavioral interventions are seen in part as responses to deficits in parenting. This is an institutional view of parents that seems pervasive in the system of education. Eliza also understands that teachers are more comfortable with fixed schedules than with the flexible scheduling that is preferred in school library literature.

### **How does the librarian negotiate the power structures of the institutions she works within?**

Another way to word this question might be to ask where does the librarian have power?

One way Eliza negotiates the power structures is by serving on committees-- interestingly, though, the building technology committee, which she is required to run, is the least active because she no longer has a regular source of information to pass along to others on the committee. Eliza is comfortable with technology and would like to help teachers use it more in class, but she has to focus on the areas of technology where she has some control over the process. She was able to help Kim with the online catalog book reviews because she was a district super-user of the software and had administrative powers that other media specialists did not. She rarely used the power without permission, but she knew that she could use it if she really needed to.

She uses knowledge and skills gained in her previous work to help the district children, such as with Book Group Day. She is honest about her own ability to maintain extra programs at her school, which is why she chose to run the Mythology Bee, knowing it was a special one-time-only event that she would not be tied into running “for the rest

of [her] life.” She grabs time to collaborate with teachers when she has the opportunity—when they are in the media center with their classes. She mentors new media specialists and helps shape how they will work within the institution.

Eliza also pays attention to what the teachers she works with want—such as changes to the district image. While she might not be able to change the focus on standardization, and did not appear to want to change the focus, she could make sure that the teachers in her school were heard when it came time to decide what to put in the image. She advocates for the teachers at RMS in her district-level activities.

### **How do these ruling relations express themselves in the work?**

Tensions exist between work connected with managing the collection and promoting reading and work connected to teaching and managing students. Eliza wants the media center to be available to students, but has a limited amount of space and time available. She takes the few minutes she can get for students to have free access—the few minutes right after school. Tensions exist between providing curriculum support for teachers and providing leisure reading for students. While this feeling appears in the literature, Eliza and the teachers she worked with appeared to have a balance between leisure reading and curriculum-related reading. When teachers called or emailed to ask for books to be pulled, Eliza or Rosie was usually able to pull a good selection of books. At the same time, the leisure reading section, especially fiction, was kept fresh and up-to-date.

Ruling relations express themselves in the work in many ways, but in this study, I focused on the areas of access, technology, and collaboration. The institutional forces

shaping school library work are often taken for granted. Some, such as hall passes, are justified as ways of keeping chaos out of schools. However, carrying out the work associated with hall passes affects relationships with students, teachers, and others. A system designed to control and track students might lead to students believing that their right to access a library or media center is dependent on the permission or presence of an adult. If the school media center is where young people learn about libraries, what are media centers teaching young people about libraries? Are social relations and institutional expectations having an unexpected effect on the perception young people have of libraries?

The media center is presented to students in text (such as the student handbook) as a place where they are welcome to learn and study and grow. Students are verbally encouraged to use the media center. At the same time, the process they have to go through to get access to the media center seems anything but welcoming. I had been troubled by this process in my work at other schools, but while analyzing my observations, I was surprised by how the systems that seem to be barriers for student access also restrict the work of teachers and the media specialist, and are institutional. From outside the world of the school, it might seem as if the media specialist has freedom in how she does her job, since she is not in a classroom eight hours a day. However, she cannot opt out of parts of the system, such as hall passes, without disrupting the system for all of the other school workers (including students.) Since the system also provides a sense of order in the media center, a school librarian might not want to opt out of the hall pass system, even if some aspects of it are troubling.

The hall pass and sign-in system presents library use and access to information as a privilege and also as something they are not entitled to unmediated access to. The systems act as barriers to student access to the physical space of the media center. They act as barriers to students choosing to use the media center, while privileging access for students on whom media center time is imposed by others.

The social organization of school library work in connection to the movement and tracking of students in the school creates interactions between library workers and students that might limit media center use. The work of maintaining the system of tracking students takes time in the work day of the media specialist and aide. Tracking down the morning study hall passes is an activity Eliza carries out every morning, along with the assistant principal for discipline. Students are also expected to carry out work in connection with the system, such as the work of obtaining a pass to go to the library or of reminding their teacher that they need a pass.

I am leaving a critique of the surveillance and tracking systems to others. My critique rests in examining how these systems work to keep students out of the media center and to teach students how not to use the library. While these systems are in place to keep students safe and provide an orderly environment, the systems are based in a lack of trust in students.

### ***Technology***

Technology is a large part of Eliza's daily work. In addition to acting as a mediator between teachers and IT workers, she also has to negotiate the difference between what she needs the technology to do and what the technology actually does. She

finds herself in a position of trying to encourage teachers to plan for technology in their classrooms, although she knows of the problems with the technology as practiced. The central IT department does not acknowledge the problem.

Published literature shows an assumption that technology is readily available to teachers and media specialists and that if there are barriers, the barriers come from the unwillingness or inability of teachers and media specialists to adopt new technology in teaching. What I observed at RMS was teachers who were willing to incorporate technology into their lessons, but who were discouraged by barriers related to systems not working correctly, systems that are not adapted to large scale technology use in classrooms, or systems in which decisions were made obscurely.

Someone has the power to determine which sites students and teachers have access to. Who that person is and exactly how they got that power is unclear. Someone has the power to determine which work order is legitimate and which complaints are not real problems. Inaction is a decision. Unresponsive IT departments are making decisions that affect a teacher's ability to plan lessons incorporating technology. What is not clear is how those people received that power and whether they are aware that their power carries pedagogical implications. Safety of the network is prioritized over education of the students. The experiences and beliefs of people outside the school building have more power than the needs and perceptions of those who work in the building. Who makes the decisions about which technology tools are available on a school network? Someone is making decisions with instructional implications. This situation is not unique to this school nor to this level of education. It also shows up in university settings.

Some technology decisions show a lack of trust in teachers. One example is locking computers down to the point where teachers are not even allowed to customize their desktop pictures, which can be educational for students if they choose desktop pictures that represent something interesting or educational. In combination with the lack of trust teachers are shown in connection with standardized testing, the school becomes a place where the key workers have the same status as the students they teach.

The daily technology-related activities Eliza carried out while I was observing her work also hint that clerical activities connected with technology are being allowed to supersede the intellectual and instructional activities connected with librarianship. The ability to help teachers with the problems they face when technology breaks down is not necessarily incompatible with school librarianship. When she is trouble-shooting in a classroom, she can see how the teacher is actually trying to use the available technology. When teachers check out the wireless cart or reserve the commons, Eliza does not always know what lesson they are working on unless they tell her. But when she goes to the room to see what is going wrong with the technology, she can also learn from the environment and from the teacher. From these visits, she can build an idea of how she might be able to help the teacher in future lessons.

### ***Collaboration***

Eliza and other media specialists in the district have been trying to promote the idea of collaboration with classroom teachers. A school environment is complex, though, and media specialists and teachers already have very full schedules. A true belief in the importance of collaboration in schools with the media specialist as catalyst requires the consent of other people in the school. Administrators, teachers, and district officials have

their own visions of how a school should be. Facilitating school-wide collaboration also requires training for media specialists on how to facilitate collaboration and manage conflict in constructive ways.

For some teachers, the media center did not appear to be a site for collaboration. For some, it was a location to take students to escape from a bad smell or a broken air conditioner. For others, it appeared to be a site to visit once a week for students to sit and read. Some teachers spent their library time checking email or grading papers. The three teachers who collaborated most strongly with Eliza during the period of observation had several things in common. All three enjoyed reading, regularly checked out books from the media center, and talked about books with Eliza, Rosie, and me. They regularly had informal conversations with Eliza and Rosie. They were not possessive of their students.

School media specialist face unacknowledged barriers to collaboration. It takes more than being a leader in the school to facilitate collaboration. Collaboration depends on more than a strong personality arranging for opportunities to collaborate. Each school's culture is different. Eliza negotiates the barriers caused by scheduling and turnover by bringing ideas to teachers while teachers are in the media center with their classes. Although she is ambivalent about fixed scheduling, the fixed scheduling instated by the previous media specialist gives Eliza more access to teachers than she might have otherwise. Eliza also spends time getting to know teachers and visiting with them while they are in the media center, so she can have a better understanding of their needs and teaching style. Thanks to having an aide in the library for most of the school day, she can also visit classrooms for higher visibility and problem-solving

The published literature criticizes media specialists for not taking the lead in issues of collaboration and technology, but these critiques seem to ignore the amount of work media specialists might already be involved in. Eliza collaborated with teachers on the book trailer project and the book review project. These collaboration opportunities arose spontaneously in the media center during the teachers' scheduled media center time. In one case, the teacher knew she wanted to incorporate technology into her teaching but she was not sure how to do that. In the other case, the teacher had an idea of what she wanted to do, but needed advice from Eliza about the best way to carry out the project. Both teachers seemed to see Eliza as a resource for ideas and help incorporating technology in teaching.

### ***Relationships with students and teachers and beliefs about school***

The design of a school and its organizational structure reveals assumptions about school. Traffic patterns are highly choreographed and student movement through the school building is strictly controlled. The motives of students in the hall during class-time, before school, and during lunch are not trusted, so their travel must be managed by adults. The Positive Behavior Support system shapes interactions with students in a prescribed way, based on an assumption that the behavior of students is a problem (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Relationships with students, teachers, and parents are shaped by the discourse of the institution of education. School library literature spends little time discussing how relationships with students are shaped by institutional policies. Interactions between students and adults in the media center are also shaped by assumptions about the purpose of the media center, that access to the media center is a

privilege, and that the media center is not a place to “hang out.” Use of the media center is teacher focused and teacher-mediated.

School library literature alludes to the reasons for preferring school media specialists with professional classroom teaching experience: that former teachers will be better able to collaborate with classroom teachers because they understand the realities of work in education (Thomas, 2006). However, this preference might also reflect that a former classroom teacher has already been subject to the surveillance machinery of the institution of education and takes it for granted.

### **Implications for school librarians**

Researchers and practitioners in school libraries are trying to change dominant methods of educating children through their promotion of the media specialist as a “catalyst for collaboration,” a technology expert, and a teacher of information literacy. It is possible for the media specialist to take on all of these roles in a school, but these roles must be accepted by others in the school. In this setting, teachers are beginning to accept Eliza as a technology leader, so they are beginning to turn to her for help with incorporating technology into lessons.

How can school librarians negotiate the tension between participating in the institution of school and facilitating access to information? The first step is always recognizing whether there is a problem. While I noticed a great deal of work going into managing student hall passes and felt that the interactions focused on the issues of regulating travel, perhaps the media center’s fixed schedule policy and the reading teachers’ treatment of media center time as a time to browse and read mitigated the possible restriction of access. Students might not have had free, on-demand access to the

media center, but most of the students did have regular access they could plan for. It is likely this even helped with getting books back in a timely manner, although at one point during my observations, a quarter of the books that were out were overdue. Hall pass and access issues need to be considered in light of the media center's goals. If there is a very low circulation rate and few visits under a flexible scheduling policy, the media specialist should examine whether there are structures in place that act as barriers to student access. Are hall pass policies a problem? Are students able to get passes to the library? Do they want to ask for hall passes? Or have they given up on the idea of accessing the library? At this school, because of the structures in place to control and manage student movement and behavior, perhaps the media center should remain on a fixed schedule. A librarian in a school with similar structures, flexible scheduling, and a low circulation rate might consider negotiating for library visits on fixed schedules.

School librarians can guard against objectifying students through interactions related to traffic management, retrieving overdue books, or moving students along as they browse. Even if the librarian agrees with these systems or is powerless to change them, they can still keep in mind that each student is an individual. This is how Eliza appeared to relate to the students in the media center, which possibly mitigated the negative effects of the institutional view of the students.

## **Implications for Teaching**

If being a “catalyst for collaboration” is a priority in school librarianship, future librarians need to learn the skills involved in successfully facilitating collaboration. This need for training goes beyond group work projects as homework. School librarians will need to learn how to manage conflicts among team members

Are schools ready for media specialists to act as catalysts for collaboration?

Team teaching has been a goal in education since the 1980s, yet this school, even with its team teaching concept, still appears somewhat cellular in structure, with teachers teaching their areas in isolation from each other. In a team teaching environment, how will the media specialist have collaborative meetings with the teams while also carrying out the other parts of school library work? Future school librarians, regardless of whether they have classroom teaching experience, will need to learn the practical and essential skills of managing their time productively, as they will be juggling a wide variety of schedules in the pursuit of a collaborative culture.

More attention needs to be paid in the teaching of future school librarians to issues around physical and intellectual access to school media centers and information. Future school librarians, regardless of their teaching backgrounds, should learn about how schools are shaped by outside forces. Researchers focus too much on recruiting teachers to be media specialists because teachers are presumed to understand how to work in a school. Perhaps students would be better served if the focus was on recruiting people who can facilitate collaboration in a very challenging environment and who understand issues of information organization and access. As a profession, school librarians should assert that their technology expertise is in using it for instruction, not just in trouble-shooting. Managing inventories is not a logical part of the media specialist job.

### **Implications for others in the school**

Others in the school are also affected by systems that objectify students and show a lack of trust in students, teachers, and parents. A system like Positive Behavior

Support, which has been adopted in more than 500 schools (Sugai & Horner, 2002), can have many positive effects in a school environment, but it can also objectify students. One way to mitigate the objectification might be to have students involved in determining the expected behaviors each year. This way, perhaps the system is not done to them. Systems like this are put in place partly to make up for the effects of very large schools, so an even better solution might be to work for smaller schools in the community.

If there is tension between school and district technology staff and educators over appropriate uses of technology, leaders in the school district (including media specialists) should look for opportunities for technology people to learn more about the pedagogical uses of technologies. Restructuring decision-making so that educators have more control over technological issues would also help in situations where IT people are making decisions that create instructional barriers. The school librarian can play a role in this restructuring by planning and implementing technology safety measures in lessons, much like what Eliza is hoping to accomplish with future lessons on Internet safety.

## **Future Work**

I have presented parts of this research at several conferences for researchers and for school librarians. Each time, I worried that I had not seen what was going on or that I had missed something. Each time, though, someone would tell me that my ideas helped them explain something that was going on in their media center or that they had not thought about these issues in exactly this way. Often, I get nods of recognition when I describe how a ruling relation affects the work. Practitioners recognize what I am saying.

In a future project, I hope to learn more about the student's work in the process of gaining access to the media center. It appears that a student who wants access to the

media center outside of the team's reading core teacher scheduled time has to ask the teacher whose class he or she is in currently for a pass to the media center. This process has more loaded into it than people want to acknowledge, but knowledge of how that process is shaped cannot be uncovered through guesses and assumptions.

Although I consider this research to be student-centered, I was not deliberately starting from the standpoint of students. However, it is clear that the practice of going to the media center in groups and the practice of getting a hall pass to go to the media center both subject the student's reading choices to the gaze of others. Teachers already have access to information about what books students are checking out, but these practices also open up reading choices to the scrutiny of classmates. In a vulnerable time like middle school, I might ask whether students' more private information needs can be met in this environment.

The study has limitations. It cannot speak for all media specialists, nor can it speak for this particular media specialist now. All it can do is show how ruling relations shaped Eliza's work during a two month period and how those relations can be mapped to the larger ruling systems and institutions in place. It can show how her work has been made invisible and it can try to make that work visible.

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## VITA

Jennifer Crispin was born at Keesler AFB, Mississippi to an Air Force family from New Jersey. She went to nine different schools in five different countries. At 18, she joined the Air Force as a broadcasting specialist. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Maryland University College in 2004, then used the GI Bill to go to library school at the University of Missouri. She completed her Master of Information Science and Learning Technologies in 2006 and went directly into the PhD program to further study school library work. She earned her PhD in Information Science and Learning Technologies in 2009. Her interests are youth services, materials for youth, school libraries, and institutional ethnography.