

In plain sight: School librarian practices within infrastructures for learning

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Abstract

This study explored how school librarian practices are resources that can support teaching and learning at schools in Sweden. The empirical material was produced through 22 semi-structured interviews with 'best practice' awarded librarians at 14 Swedish secondary and upper-secondary schools. The theoretical framework consisted of a practice theory approach coupled with analytical concepts from information infrastructure studies. The findings highlighted how teachers and librarians collaborate closely in schools with designated best practice libraries. Members of both professions collaborated in teaching and interdisciplinary projects and were supported by management teams at the schools under study. However, the librarians expressed a disconnect between themselves and the teachers and leaders of the school. This disconnect was evidenced by a lack of planning practices and classroom teaching, impelling the librarians to advocate continuously for better awareness and visibility of their practices. The article offers insights into school librarian practices at sites that function simultaneously as both workplaces for professionals with multiple competencies and educational settings for students.

Keywords

Collaboration, school librarians, school libraries, teaching, theory of information infrastructure, visibility

Introduction and problem statement

In Sweden, the Education Act of 2010 stipulate that mandatory access to school libraries is required for all students (SFS, 2010). Nevertheless, Sweden shares difficulties in establishing purposeful or successful school libraries with many other countries, such as the UK and the US (Gildersleeves, 2012; Schultz Nybacka, 2019; Shenton, 2014). A report from 2013 argued that the status of Swedish school libraries and school librarians has not increased over time despite legislation, national initiatives, further education in different forms and active lobbying from several organisations (Thomas, 2013). A research survey of Swedish school library studies between 2010 and 2015 demonstrated that school libraries generally have a weak position (Gärdén, 2017), and official statistics report that only half of the 1.3 million Swedish students (aged 6–19) have access to a school library staffed by at least a half-time librarian (The Swedish Royal Library, 2021). Furthermore, it is not uncommon for a school librarian to single-handedly serve over 1000 students (The Swedish Royal Library, 2022). As a result, a nationwide inquiry (SOU, 2021: 3) pointed to the necessity of rewriting school law in order to enable schools to reach the level required by the Education Act. Despite this description, around a

100 Swedish school libraries were found to be purposeful, successful or engaging in 'best practices'. This study builds on the accounts of 22 school librarians working in 14 'best practice' Swedish secondary and upper-secondary school libraries.

Substantial research and field reports revealed that student performance improves with well-staffed school libraries and professionally educated school librarians (Gärdén, 2017; Oberg, 2012; Todd, 2012, 2015; Todd and Kuhlthau, 2005, 2016). Further, the school library programme benefits from close collaboration between teachers and librarians with support from management (Francis et al., 2010; Gildersleeves, 2012; Lonsdale, 2003). Similarly, high-quality library programmes led by librarians who share their expertise with the whole school can benefit student achievement (Lance and Kachel, 2018). Furthermore, Curtis (2017) demonstrated that school librarians adapt efficiently to challenges posed by technical and societal changes by identifying new opportunities.

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For decades, studies have documented the efforts of school librarians to participate in teaching and learning opportunities (Dow et al., 2012; Montiel-Overall, 2016; Montiel-Overall and Hernández, 2012; Neuman, 2003). At the same time, librarianship has been described as lonely, marginalised, isolated, and misunderstood (Lawton, 2015; Sacco Ritchie, 2011). Hartzell (1997) even went as far as calling school librarians *invisible professionals* suffering from *occupational invisibility* (Hartzell, 2002). Previous articles and reports often revolved around the challenges of communication and cooperation between school librarians, teachers, and management. Consequently, issues concerning work practices, collaboration, and support from management have been thoroughly documented.

Aim and research question

The above discussions raise the issue of how librarians actually support teaching and learning at schools. In many schools this is a complex task, as school librarians often lack sufficient staffing, funding, support from management, and cooperation with teachers. This article focuses on award-winning ‘best practice’ school libraries to study how librarians enable and support teaching and learning through their practices. Research on best practices often highlights collaboration between the school library and how the other pedagogical activities in the school can be designed and performed in a better way (Cooper and Bray, 2011; Copeland and Jacobs, 2017; McKeever et al., 2017; Todd, 2015). There is a need to understand how school librarians are supporting teaching and learning within these ‘best practice’ sites. The research reported in this article was framed by the theoretical notion of information infrastructure for learning. According to Guribye et al. (2005: 2), infrastructures for learning ‘can be seen as a set of (physical, technical and social) resources that support a certain learning practice’. Using this framing as a starting point, this study argues that school librarian practices can be understood as resources that support teaching and learning at schools.

Building on interviews with 22 Swedish school librarians, the aim of this study was to explore how school librarian practices constitute resources that support teaching and learning at schools. Drawing on work performed in a previous study (Centerwall and Nolin, 2019), this study argued that school libraries can be understood as infrastructures for learning, which in turn consist of various structures, arrangements and resources that support a range of different practices taking place at schools. From this theoretical notion of school libraries, the following research question was posed:

- How do school librarian practices constitute resources that support teaching and learning?

Research on school librarians

Research on school libraries has largely described the roles and activities of the libraries together with the opportunities and challenges encountered by the librarians in their professional practice. The effect on student achievements of schools having professionally educated librarians has been the subject of empirical studies since the 1950s (Bikos et al., 2014). Influential researchers such as Kuhlthau, Lance and Todd have studied the role of school librarians in the promotion of student achievement, finding that school libraries contribute to learning in terms of reaching curriculum goals, information literacy and understanding the different strategies for conducting effective research (Francis et al., 2010; Lance and Kachel, 2018; Todd, 2012; Todd and Kuhlthau, 2005, 2016). Studies show that students with access to well-staffed school libraries perform better than students with access to poorly-staffed libraries, in areas such as information literacy, the ethical use of information, as well as how students understand the research process in school assignments (Krueger and Donham, 2013). In their impact study, Dow et al. (2012) found that having a school librarian employed at least part-time tended to yield higher achievements in the subject areas studied. Similar results were described by Francis et al. (2010), pointing to the benefits of a full-time librarian compared to a part-time employee or no librarian at all. Furthermore, Lance and Kachel (2018) suggested that the presence of school librarians has long-term, cumulative effects (Lance and Kachel, 2018). Crispin (2021), on the other hand, argues that an idealised view of school library work is presented in available research because of the tendency of school librarians to emphasise how they can help students achieve their learning goals.

A common discursive viewpoint positions teaching as vital to the professional identity of school librarians (Agyemang, 2020; Julien and Genuis, 2011). In ‘best practice’ school libraries, the librarians teach both in the library environment as well as in classrooms. Previous studies have provided taxonomies and models of collaboration (Loertscher, 1988; Loertscher and Koechlin, 2015; Montiel-Overall, 2007, 2008, 2016); identified how the perceptions of teachers and lack of sufficient knowledge about the role of the school library poses challenges (Latham et al., 2013); and how the school librarian is typically responsible for initiating and pursuing collaboration (Gildersleeves, 2012). Others have pointed to the importance of well-staffed school libraries (Francis et al., 2010; Haycock, 2011) and shown how school librarians constantly struggle to receive support from school management (Hartzell, 2002; Shannon, 2012; Turner et al., 2007). Previous research has also identified the main teaching areas for both librarians and teachers as: democratic issues, citizenship, media- and information literacy, credibility, and critical thinking in a digital society (see also Merga,

2021). In such areas, both teachers and librarians share a common concern and professional overlap. Librarians and teachers thus face the challenge of collaborating while respecting each other's spaces and places (see also Loertscher and Koechlin, 2015; Montiel-Overall, 2007, 2008). Collaboration is a prevailing issue within school library research, both as a research object and a result of empirical studies. Networking, coordination, cooperation, and partnership have been recurring topics in such research (Montiel-Overall, 2016). The ability to collaborate is seen as crucial for the success of school librarians (Partridge et al., 2010). In an example of three successful collaborations between librarians and teachers, Kammer et al. (2021) reported on a series of strategies used to lead such collaborations. The strategies included initiating, securing, identifying, obtaining, and analysing collaborations. Further, Bentley et al. (2016) stated that 'the successful school librarian is involved in a continuous negotiation of role, identity and professional values depending on the context of the situation' (p. 20). Centerwall (2019) investigated the sayings and doings of librarians at successful school libraries and determined that school librarians engage in a range of tasks to increase their visibility and status as acknowledged actors at the school site.

Practice theoretical framework

In this article, practice theory is used because of a special interest in how school librarian practices and visibility are connected. Using a practice theory approach, schools can be seen as sites for sayings, doings and relatings (Kemmis et al., 2014; Star and Ruhleder, 1996). Building on this, school libraries can be positioned as sites for numerous practices (Schatzki, 2002). This article combined perspectives from practice theory with analytical concepts drawn from studies on information infrastructure for learning (Guribye, 2015; Guribye et al., 2005; Guribye and Lindström, 2009). The theoretical framework was constructed using different theories and perspectives, which together created a toolbox (Nicolini, 2012) for examining how the sayings, doings and relatings of school librarians can become resources for educational practices. Conceiving of infrastructure as layered, relational, and intertwined with practice allowed for more complex analysis of the work and learning practices of school librarians (cf. Bowker et al., 2010; Star and Ruhleder, 1996). The current study could thereby be placed in the context of previous research that investigated practices from an infrastructure approach (e.g. Francke et al., 2017; Ott, 2017; Ott et al., 2018).

Information infrastructure for learning

An infrastructure for learning is defined as '*a set of resources and arrangements – social, institutional,*

technical – that are designed to and/or assigned to support a learning practice' (Guribye and Lindström, 2009: 154). Therefore, the notion of infrastructure for learning can explain how artefacts are interconnected and enmeshed with arrangements that support learning practices, the exchange of knowledge and learning processes. Since both the materiality and the sociality of the infrastructure can support, enable and constrain learning, the infrastructure is in itself part of the social, material and technological conditions of a practice (cf. Guribye and Lindström, 2009).

By using the infrastructure for learning approach schools can be understood as sites for various practices supported by several different professions and vocations that maintain their own infrastructures. For example, a secondary or upper-secondary Swedish school (like those under study in this article) is staffed by administrators, career guidance counsellors, IT-technicians, IT/ICT-teachers, janitors, kitchen staff, nurses, principals, school counsellors, school librarians, special-needs teachers and subject teachers. All school infrastructures are organised around the students. The schools in this study vary regarding the number of students and staff, orientations, and prerequisites, but they are all organised similarly for the same (learning) purposes. The theoretical information infrastructure perspective entails ordering various practices in the foreground or the background of a site (outlined for example in Centerwall and Nolin, 2019), where some practices can be understood as 'sinking into the background' (Star and Ruhleder, 1996: 112). Since classroom teaching and learning are often described as the most important practices in schools, other infrastructures can become part of the background support for classroom practices (e.g. Lu et al., 2015; Slotta et al., 2013; Stevens et al., 2016).

It is common to view the classroom and its learning and teaching practices as the most central and visible infrastructure at the site of the school. Thus, the infrastructures around the classroom work as a support or resource for classroom practices. This view has also been taken in some previous educational research (e.g. Ott, 2017; Stevens et al., 2016). However, in the examples under study in this paper, both schools and their libraries were seen as infrastructures for learning because they are 'aimed at learning and knowledge development' (Guribye and Lindström, 2009: 154). The approach in this article was to view the school as a site involving a broad range of school practices where a multitude of infrastructures enable sayings, doings and relatings. School librarian practices exemplify some of the ongoing practices at the site of a school.

School librarian practices as infrastructures for learning

In a previous study, Centerwall and Nolin (2019) created a model to investigate the school library as an infrastructure

at a school site. The starting point of the model was that school libraries can be seen as a set of institutional, professional, and technical structures, arrangements and resources that support various practices carried out at schools. Building on this approach, this study focuses on school librarians to explore how school librarian practices constitute professional and institutional resources for teaching and learning in schools, and how material resources are being used within these practices. For the purpose of this study, *institutional* resources are understood as resources for the school as an institution for teaching and learning. Therefore, school librarian practices were viewed as contributing to the success of the school, through a variety of activities involving teaching and learning. The concept *professional* is understood as including practices such as teaching and supporting teaching as well as making the profession and its competencies visible. Material resources are understood as both the library room and its material and digital resources. Consequently, the presentation and analysis of the empirical data were structured by the theoretical concepts of *institutional* resources, *professional* resources and *material* resources.

Method

Although the provision of and access to school libraries is required in Sweden, it is challenging to identify ‘best practice’ school libraries. The selection of libraries for this study thus included a strategy for identifying ‘best practice’ school libraries using criteria developed by the Swedish library trade union DIK (2022). The trade union yearly award best-practice school libraries of Sweden. The awards are primarily based on staffing, media budgets, and the quality of collaboration with teachers as well as management support. For this study, libraries were chosen from the list of awarded secondary and upper secondary schools. The selection was limited to libraries that were fully integrated into schools, and did not include school libraries that were combined with public libraries, which is a common organisational solution in Sweden. This selection resulted in a list of 14 schools in 12 municipalities. These 14 schools had 22 working school librarians which means that some schools had one while others had two. The 22 librarians were each individually interviewed. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted at the participants’ workplaces. The interviews lasted for 40–90 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim, after which the participants were offered the chance to read the transcripts. Quotes in this article is translated carefully from Swedish to English by the researcher. The study followed the ethical research principles developed by The Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Swedish Research Council, 2017). When referring to the participants fictional non-gendering

names are used. The non-gendered names were chosen based on two ethical considerations. In Sweden, the community of award-winning school librarians are small. This means that librarians who are men or queer could easily be identified. Further, the participants were not asked about their gender.

Issues discussed during the interviews concerned the roles and tasks of the librarians (cf. Centerwall, 2019), making the library and oneself visible (cf. Centerwall and Nolin, 2019), teaching and working in the library, as well as identifying and working with norms and values in the library and the school (cf. Centerwall, 2022). While the empirical data generated themes, the practice theory approach structured and guided the analysis, and allowed for the focus to be centred on librarians’ accounts when describing their activities and interaction with other professionals at the school site. The accounts of the participants were analysed thematically using the three theoretical concepts of institutional, professional, and material resources (described further in Section 6 below). Similarities emerged more clearly than differences in the participants’ accounts during the data analysis. This was interpreted as resulting from the similarity of the selection pool, given that all the respondents were working in award-winning best practices libraries. Through accounts produced at the very moment of the interviews it was possible to dig deeper into the various practices. However, the activities described by the participants could not be observed through interviews alone. Instead, the accounts are understood based on visits at the libraries, readings of policies and plans, and from the researcher’s professional experience of working as a school librarian. As the selection of participants was limited to professionally educated school librarians, this study only accounted for their perspectives and not other school library staff.

School librarian practices in infrastructures for learning – findings

In the following sections, the findings are presented in line with the theoretical concepts of *institutional* resources, *professional* resources, and *material* resources.

Institutional resources

When analysing the data, the concept of institutional resources was viewed in relation to the school as an educational institution for teaching and learning. In a variety of ways, school librarian practices contribute and enable teaching and learning throughout the school. Analysis revealed that school librarian practices were construed as institutional resources mainly through collaborations and project management. This is examined in the following sections.

Collaborations. Collaboration runs as a thread through the empirical data of this study. Mostly, this relates to librarians' interactions with subject teachers. The collaborations described by the participants ranged from sporadic to systematic and well established. Participants would, in an ideal setting, choose to work with teachers in all subject areas, however, lack of time and professional resources in terms of staffing forced librarians to prioritise, as Darcy explains below:

Darcy: I give priority to teachers interested in collaboration because I don't have time to collaborate with everyone. I'm the only librarian here for about 1000 students.

Within the empirical data, participants identified three strategies for how and with whom they decide to collaborate. First, the librarians could choose those who show an interest in collaboration, as in Darcy's case. Second, they could choose those who teach in subject areas closely related to the specific competence of librarians or third, simply those with whom they feel comfortable and have developed a relationship. Typically, subject teachers interested in collaboration were native language (Swedish) teachers and social science teachers, with similar tasks and aims, such as developing reading skills, literacy and information literacy.

In the empirical data there were also examples of collaboration with other professionals, such as the school nurse:

Peyton: We've talked about it, me and the school nurse/. . ./ that we could give them tips about reading, not just non-fiction about what happens in the body but also fiction.

Together the librarian and the nurse planned a project within healthcare intended to positively influence student learning processes in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights. By bringing together professionals and subject areas, librarians can build a foundation for cooperation within the educational staff. Such activities position librarians in the centre of school practices, a position to which the participants gave accounts of often aspiring, and through which they could bring together teachers and students in new ways. In line with previous research (e.g. Montiel-Overall, 2008), the participants in this study emphasised how planning for the librarian's intervention leads to becoming fully involved. The librarians thus became institutional resources through collaborating with a variety of teachers. The collaborations were, according to the librarians, led, planned, initiated, and organised mainly by the librarians themselves.

Participants also noted that the strong and unquestioned authority that teachers have in the classroom can sometimes be a challenge for collaboration. Therefore, librarians become dependent on the goodwill of the teachers to

obtain access to the classroom or to teach in the library at a scheduled time. Similar challenges arise when teachers send students to the library without previous notice. This can serve as a power negotiation, whereby the plans of the librarian are subsumed by the expectations of the teacher. The librarians found this a hindrance to providing good service and equity of access, both of which are core values in librarianship (cf. Foster and McMenemy, 2012; Hicks, 2016). The participants expressed frustration with their work being taken for granted by teachers and administrative colleagues, who do not fully grasp that sending a class to the library requires significant invisible labour on the part of librarians. However, in some cases these problems have been dealt with by working towards integrating library practices with teaching. Such was the case for Daryl:

Daryl: The school library is definitely integrated into teaching and it's a teaching resource that both students and teachers are familiar with. We have very good contact with teachers and everything works smoothly.

The above statement details a scenario wherein librarians are being integrated into classroom practices. This example bares out previous research highlighting cooperation between librarians and teachers as essential if the library is to function as a teaching resource (Limberg, 2007; Montiel-Overall, 2008). Because this study focuses on 'best practice' librarians, the empirical data revealed good examples of collaborations and coalitions between librarians and teachers, where the former were well-integrated in classroom practices.

Working in collaboration highlights the social and communicative aspects of school librarian practices. Engagement in connecting practices may also result in countering isolation, marginalisation, invisibility and lack of agency. The empirical data in this study revealed two ways of ameliorating these concerns. Some librarians described themselves as having important roles when it came to connecting different teaching and library practices. However, these librarians also related their experiences of being forgotten or isolated, alone or alienated. Others expressed a *former* experience of marginalisation that they were *no longer* experiencing. It was thus possible for the participants to describe their practices as both connected *and* marginalised. A novel thread in this study was the expression by some librarians of striving to be positioned at the heart of the school site and its practices.

School librarians who have received professional education and training use their specialised knowledge and skills in diverse areas. The school librarian is typically the only member of staff with this specialised educational background and thus represents a different profession than their teaching colleagues. This position entails both independence and autonomy from other school infrastructures

while at the same time working in close connection with other educational staff. Although the school library should be understood as an infrastructure of its own, it still retains a fragile autonomy. While other teaching staff in schools can count on more independence in developing their teaching practices, this is not always the case for librarians, whose autonomy and agency are relative to that of others. The relative autonomy of a librarian is crucial for understanding the school as an infrastructure for learning. Further, whenever management teams in schools promote classroom practices, the professional skills of librarians are likely to become less visible than those of their teaching peers (see also Centerwall and Nolin, 2019).

Project management. School librarians not only take part in but also initiate, operate, or lead projects at the school site (see also Partridge et al., 2010; Smith, 2011). Collaborative projects are often a coalition between subject area teachers and librarians and can contribute to learning for all participants. A student-centred approach is common to these projects where professionals from various fields collaborate. For school librarians, an important outcome of collaborative projects is to reach new students. Examples from the empirical data of such crossover projects were commonly found in social science and history subjects in which the school librarian promoted literature or taught critical source evaluation. Fran provided an example of working in crossover projects with a history teacher:

Fran: As soon as they [the students] have some kind of project, for example when the *Hotel and Tourism* program had a project called “For good and for bad”, I think. And what can we do there? Well, we go in together with the teacher in history and take a book with us and create a project with that teacher around that book, in this subject relating to Hotel and Tourism.

Other examples described by the participants included helping students to write essays and reports, specifically by teaching through guided inquiry, developing students’ information seeking skills, helping students perform the information search process, or supporting their literacy development (see also Francke et al., 2011; Limberg et al., 2008).

Opportunities for crossover projects between librarians and teachers sometimes emerged when certain subject areas were in crisis. Such a crisis can ensue from lack of funding, lack of a privileged position in the curriculum, lack of interest from leadership or lack of teacher interest or competence. For example, projects commonly led by the participants often included subjects in the arts, such as creative writing, poetry, or visual arts. The work of the librarians involved arranging and hosting exhibitions and poetry readings in the library. Similarly, participants also helped students with projects focused on assignments exploring democracy, equality, or human rights issues (see

also Subramaniam et al., 2013). In the empirical data for this study, these projects were initiated and led by school librarians. The reasons behind the librarians work with the democratic assignment and projects with themes of democracy were often stated coming from the views of school libraries as having a democratic mission:

Marion: We [the library] have an agenda. If one works at schools one ought to work with the agenda. One should work with certain values and in the service of democracy

Like Marion, many of the participants viewed democratic work as a core value of the profession for school librarians, and in particular the fostering of democratic citizens.

In conclusion, the analysis shows the ways in which school librarian practices constitute resources that support teaching and learning through their focus on collaboration and project leading. The librarians’ teaching roles involved sharing subject areas and interests with other professions at the school site. To function well, these roles must be supported by structures and arrangements for collaboration within the infrastructure for learning. Such structures and arrangements enable communication in and between professional groups and networks, and within projects or meetings. By using a range of strategies to access teaching in classrooms, the librarians gain opportunities to use their professional competencies to teach and support teaching and learning. The teaching librarian thus benefits from co-planning and co-teaching with teachers.

Professional resources

In the following sections, school librarian practices are examined as professional resources in the school infrastructure for learning. This study positions school librarians as ‘professional resources’ when they perform teaching, provide support for teaching, spread awareness, and promote the visibility of the school librarian profession and its areas of expertise.

Teaching and supporting. As a practice for school librarians, teaching can take several forms and be part of various subject areas. This can include teaching within acknowledged areas of expertise such as reading and literature or media and information literacy. It can also involve introducing students and staff to the library environment, its materials, and professional resources. Teaching within these areas is a core vocation for school librarians which is manifested in policies, agendas, professional missions, and daily work activities.

Rather than replacing subject area teachers, librarian practices of classroom teaching detailed by participants served to complement the work of teachers by supporting educational practices. Such support could take the form of co-teaching, complementary lessons, guiding

the development of a lesson, or in other ways contributing to lessons with librarians' competencies. According to the participants, this support was aimed at teachers as well as students. Fran defines the school library mission in terms of support for students:

Fran: Our mission is to help students attain their study goals and to be part of the process of supporting. In various ways.

This also illustrates how participants linked supporting students to study goals. Such a connection also provides nuanced advocacy for school librarianship. These responses also reveal the aims and ambitions informing the development of librarian practices. By underlining the goals of students to meet curriculum objectives, the librarians emphasise their integration in the teaching team. Such ambitions were detailed by the participants in the interviews and expressed by librarians directly to teachers and school leaders. It is important to note that there were participants who, like Fran, described their main mission in terms of support as a main school library goal while others described it as a peripheral goal. However, whether it was teaching performed directly by librarians or providing support for the teaching of others, librarian practices became resources within the same areas and competencies such as those listed in the paragraph above. Lynn pointed to the close connections between school library practices, students, teachers and curriculum goals:

Lynn: My connection is to facilitate. For both students and teachers, and to help students reach curriculum goals. That's my connection.

Lynn used the word 'facilitate' instead of 'support'. This is another example of advocating for the importance of school librarian practices. Facilitating activities and supporting teachers can help librarians to strengthen, enhance, and develop awareness of school library competencies. Teaching and supporting *all* students are also emphasised by the participants, for example in expressions like this from Noel:

Noel: We are collaborating with all grades and in all subjects. We reach all students.

Advocating and raising awareness. A well-researched challenge for school librarians is the varying levels of awareness about their work among other professional groups (Cooper and Bray, 2011; Hartzell, 2002). Baker and Willis (2016), for example, found that newly employed teachers did not know what school librarians do. In the empirical data for the study outlined in this article, school librarians contributed to awareness of their professional areas through practices of teaching and supporting.

Other ways respondents increased awareness were continuous teaching, informing, reminding, and promoting of

the competencies, activities, and subject areas of school librarians (cf. Centerwall, 2019). Work to increase awareness was directed towards all actors within the school including parents and decision makers. This study thus aligns with Oddone (2016), who argued that a key challenge for school library professionals is to convince management and others that school librarians 'are so much more than the "keeper of the books"'. The role has changed, and it is constantly evolving to meet contemporary teaching and learning needs' (n.p.). In other words, the librarians participating in this study frequently viewed themselves as not only advocating for their own practices and themselves as supporting resources, but also for school libraries in general. Although the agenda might vary, their objectives were to create a higher level of awareness of the school library and librarianship. Peyton describes this as a necessary though unappreciated task:

Peyton: I think you always wind up in this dilemma that you don't want to have to justify your existence and market yourself and what you do. But unfortunately, you have to.

The dilemma of self- and professional- advocacy that Peyton refers to requires significant time and effort that might have been directed towards other tasks. However, the phrasing employed by Peyton underlines the necessity to keep promoting and advocating for school librarianship in order to achieve greater visibility. The transcripts from the interviews performed in this study were filled with statements from librarians who advocated for their professional identity as a kind of performativity, demonstrating their value in the eyes of students as well as of teachers and management. If collaboration is to be successful it is necessary for the professionals involved to develop a mutual understanding of their respective roles and disciplines (Johnston, 2015). Collaborating with individual teachers can result in increased visibility, which in turn attracts the interest of other teachers who then foster collaborations of their own (Cooper and Bray, 2011). This was a common strategy employed by participants to attain the visibility and collaboration required for the development of a deepened appreciation of school libraries. However, a critical examination of such expressions and descriptions revealed a vicious cycle, as a deepened awareness is needed for the librarians to become visible in the first place (cf. Centerwall and Nolin). It is possible that some teachers have already developed such an awareness but were choosing not to collaborate with librarians for unknown reasons.

Using material resources to mediate teaching and learning

The rapid digital turn of Western societies has also created new challenges for the professional development of school librarians and their ability to provide necessary digital

infrastructures in schools. Inspired by Guribye and Lindström (2009), in this study the school was conceptualised as an infrastructure for learning where actors use material resources to mediate teaching and learning. In the following sections, the school library environment, its media, and its technology are viewed as material resources that can support school librarian practices.

The school library room as a material resource. School librarians engage in practices that are not exclusive to the library; they are also enacted in other areas of the school. In many cases, librarians operate in both the library and the classroom. Having two spaces to meet and reach student can be both a strength and a limitation, particularly when one of the spaces is in the domain of another profession. In the library, participants noted that it was usually librarians who set the rules. The issues attached to intruding – both physically and disciplinarily – on another professionals' areas of expertise were voiced by the librarians. However, they also related what gained from interacting in across spatial boundaries. School librarians and their practices were integrated into the school site as material, institutional, and professional resources for mediating teaching and learning practices.

For librarians to work extensively in classroom settings, at least two librarians are required at a given school. Otherwise, the library will frequently be closed as a result of the absence of the sole librarian. However, classroom work can extend the boundaries of the library, thereby giving librarians the opportunity to integrate the classroom into school librarian practices. This was mentioned by Lynn:

Lynn: It can work if there's a librarian and two assistants if you just want the library to be a place where people go and borrow books. It doesn't work if you also want the library to be an educational resource for schoolwork in order to better reach goals.

This classroom dilemma involved keeping the library open and available to all students and was expressed by the participants as equally important as reaching beyond the library by participating in teaching. Because he worked with another librarian, Brett was afforded opportunities to work in classrooms:

Brett: It's tremendously valuable that there are two librarians. And it's one of those things that has empowered us to both leave the library physically, because it's open all day, and to go down and work outwards [with teaching], it gives us the prerequisites to be able to do that.

This and other examples from the empirical data suggest that teaching and learning were mediated by the school library in several ways. The library environment increases visibility in cases where it functions as the core around

which all school activities revolve. Practices performed in, around, and in connection with the school library thus create new ways of working with technical resources and highlight competencies that were previously invisible. In conclusion, according to the participants of this study, the library environment was highlighted as the most important material resource for their student-focused work.

Technical developments are also transforming the mission, function, and practices of school libraries. One of the most dramatic aspects these developments is that many students have their own Internet access in their pockets through a smartphone and frequently also through other devices such as tablets and laptops. Consequently, school librarians have the potential to change the conditions for teaching, learning, and information use. Several schools in this study had a Wi-Fi -connection that was unavailable to the students or did not work in all areas of the school. At these sites, the school library offered unique access to computers (mainly used to watch films) and the Internet (because not every student has a smartphone).

Digital transformation requires a renegotiation of the relationship between the classroom and the school library. For professional school librarians, this results in an increasing overlap between their own skills and those of ICT-teachers and specialists (Deissler et al., 2015; Johnston, 2015). The participants in this study emphasised that they have taken on a larger role in guiding the information activities of students as they become more directly concerned with an overload of information sources and engaged in projects of user-generated content. At schools where management teams have identified librarians as proficient in digital and accessible media and programmes, this has also resulted in greater visibility for the librarians. School librarians are largely prepared to act as technology leaders even though there are many barriers to the enactment of this responsibility (Luetkemeyer, 2016). These barriers are often related to misunderstandings of the role of the school librarian. The presence of an ICT-teachers specialist at a school site enables collaborative relationships but may also generate competitive relationships between professionals (Johnston, 2015). Some of the participants in this study felt that they were challenged by technical developments while others expressed confidence.

Discussion

This section outlines the main three ways described by participants that school librarian practices can constitute educational resources for the school as an infrastructure for learning.

Firstly, the findings highlight the teaching roles of school librarians. Within school library research there is a broad consensus regarding the importance of cooperation and collaboration between school librarians and other educators (e.g. Latham and Gross, 2017; Latham et al., 2013).

Within this study such conclusions are nuanced by highlighting school librarian practices as resources that support teaching and learning. School librarian practices can constitute professional resources when librarians share their specific competencies, knowledge, and interests with teaching staff. This could be accomplished by teaching in library-specific topics and supporting teachers whenever the opportunity arises. Consequently, school librarian practices were often discussed by the participants in terms of service and support. Within their teaching roles, school librarians share subject areas with other educators and therefore need to find structures and arrangements for collaboration. Such structures and arrangements could be professional networks, projects, working groups, or meetings. Through strategies to access classrooms and thus students, the specific skills of librarians could also be used in classroom teaching. School librarian practices constitute institutional resources for the school as a site for teaching and learning by initiating, leading, and managing collaborations aimed at supporting learning. For the school, the presence of the librarian in classrooms could partly replace a lack of staff or competencies, for example when the librarian is used instead of a substitute teacher or instead of any other profession at the school. Within the school library community, and among the participants in this study, such replacement is seen as most problematic. The tasks typical for the school librarian, and teaching in particular, benefit from joint planning, co-teaching and collaboration within the body of educational and teaching staff. The participants related that they were often the leaders, planners, initiators, and organisers of collaborations with teachers. Collaborations were described by librarians as overlapping both subjects and professions, giving the students opportunities to make connections between these areas. In addition, participants noted that collaborations among librarians and teachers also resulted in increased knowledge transfer about their respective skills and disciplinary expertise.

Secondly, project management and leading interdisciplinary projects offered opportunities for school librarians to take a lead in the educational work of the school. This often involved creating, arranging, and leading educational and arts projects. Such projects included organising theme days or art activities at the school and being active in creative projects. These projects also served as important arenas for collaborations with other educators such as art teachers or ICT (Information and Communications Technology) educators. Participants contextualised collaborative projects as occasions to reach more students in addition to the students who voluntarily visit the library. For students, the collaboration of educators connected subject areas and learning contexts and thus enhanced learning (see also Bikos et al., 2014). The boundaries of material resources such as the school library environment and classrooms were thereby also renegotiated. Collaborative

projects that are co-created and managed by librarians and subject can make use of the expertise of both professions while offering school librarians ways to reach the students. However, participants in this study sometimes experience disconnection in relation to teachers, management, planning practices, and the classroom. On the one hand, there is a close connection between teachers and librarians concerning practices related to learning. On the other hand, the interdependency practiced by the librarians in relation to the classroom is not always recognised in a reciprocal way by teachers and management (cf. Centerwall and Nolin, 2019).

Thirdly, the analysis showed that performative expressions were used by participants to advocate the value of the library at the school site as well as the role of the librarian in relation to the achievements of students. By performing their specific tasks, the librarians raised awareness of their areas of expertise and demonstrated their value. Accounts of sayings, doings and relatings performed or enacted with the aim of advocating and raising awareness about school librarian practices were repeated many times by the participants. Such performances allow librarians to claim their specific space at the school site, as professional resources who not only carry out teaching responsibilities, but who also support teachers in their objective to help students reach their learning goals. With the aim of raising awareness of school libraries and their areas of expertise, school librarians advocate not only their own activities but promote school libraries in general. This study explores the practices librarians use to support teachers and thereby strengthen, improve, and develop awareness of school libraries. Collaboration could lead to increased visibility while developing the understand of other educators and management teams regarding school libraries. In conclusion, the work of school librarians in collaboration and advocacy could lead to increased opportunities to situate themselves as highly skilled educational resources.

The need for self and professional promotion discussed by the participants has been previously explored by Hicks (2016) who stated that when librarians' advocate their services it is in fact advocacy for the value of the profession (see also Foster and McMenemy, 2012). The constant need to justify and promote (Centerwall, 2019) creates obstacles for the further development of librarian practices. However, this is in tension with the need to proactively highlight the invisible labour performed by librarians and to construct work practices that are perceived as important, which are two major facets of school library work.

Concluding remarks

By highlighting the practices and experiences of school librarians, this article contributes to *making the invisible visible* (see also Star and Ruhleder, 1996). It is thereby theoretically connected to studies of infrastructures (e.g.

Francke et al., 2017; Guribye, 2005; Guribye et al., 2005; Guribye, 2015; Guribye and Lindström, 2009). Participants reported situations that aligned with discussions within infrastructure studies of invisible workers who silently carry out necessary work in the background. This study used infrastructure theories to highlight the relationship between librarians, teachers, and other staff regarding autonomy, functions, missions and conditions, power and positions. By doing so, this article contributes in a theoretically innovative way to understandings of school librarian practices and their visibility at schools. School librarians appear to be a special case of invisible professionals: hidden in plain sight at the school site. The discrepancy between the professional status of librarians and teachers often lies in different perspectives. Even more so, it is grounded in the formal positions of teachers, who can use guidelines and curricula to negotiate power, responsibility, and agency among each other, students, and other staff, including librarians. These conclusions suggest that when the competence of the school librarian is invisible as a professional resource in schools, there will be less co-planning, co-teaching, cooperation, or symbiotic collaboration. In contrast, the school librarians in this study describe themselves as visible professionals at the school site, although at occasions still experience the well-known school librarian loneliness. They describe their positions as central to the functioning of the school, in plain sight at the school site, and this positioning is the key to integrating their practices successfully in learning practices.

Often, challenges and problems have been placed outside the agency or practices of librarians and instead within politics and policies of management teams. However, school librarian practices include a variety of ways to strategically take on the challenges of the profession in order to upend subordinate positions, gain agency, and become more visible as important – and hopefully equal – practitioners in the school environment. The different ways of becoming institutional and professional resources as well as the ways in which material resources were used to mediate teaching and learning also served as strategies for librarians to situate themselves as valued and visible educational resources in schools. Highlighting the restricted, marginalised and underappreciated role of librarians – described by both participants in this study and in previous research – adds to an understanding of how school librarian practices develop at a school site. Considering this dichotomy helps to explain the frustrations of school librarians and their many successes. In other words, the librarians describe their practices in constant relation to descriptions and experiences of limited resources and funding cuts (see also Merga, 2021). As pointed out by Crispin, practicing school librarians need research that ‘look[s] at the invisible forces shaping the daily work of school librarianship’ (2021: 1). To speak of success empowers both school library practitioners and researchers in the common aim of

understanding and advocating school library programmes. Still, future research is needed to further explore both the visible and invisible aspects of school librarian practices and the role of the school librarian as a most visible teaching resource in the information infrastructures of schools.

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