Research-Practice Partnerships:
Reaching Underserved Students in the School Library

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ABSTRACT

The media coordinators in one school district undertook a year-long action research project to increase diversity of materials in their library collections and the use of these diverse materials. This study will document and describe their efforts within a research-practice partnership, while also providing an analysis of the change in practice over time from pre- to post-intervention. Content analysis will be used to evaluate purchase orders made prior to the interventions. Interventions to increase diverse collections and programming will be instituted by the lead media specialist. During the action research project, the media coordinators used diversity tools to analyze their collections. Content analysis will again be used to evaluate purchase orders made after the interventions were implemented. Interviews of school librarians and the lead media specialist will provide thick description of change in materials purchasing and use due to professional development interventions.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

school libraries; collection development; continuing education; education programs/schools

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

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INTRODUCTION

This contribution explores how LIS education in a research-practice partnership between a university MLS program and one local school district's libraries transforms LIS education in an interconnected world. By growing diversity in school library collections through professional development, this district has recently followed trends toward provision and use of materials to reach underserved students in the school library. In this small city with a thriving university, the LIS research-practice worlds are interconnected as evidenced by a university/school district partnership to create a positive impact on our students' access to diverse library collections (personal communication, February 19, 2020). An informal survey of school librarians in this district, referred to as "Media Coordinators", indicates that

approximately 85% had completed or were currently completing their MLS or certificate at the local university. Through professional development and panel discussion by university faculty for district media coordinators, this paper engages with the notion of change and transformation of LIS education through continuing education.

Penuel and Gallagher (2017) present a practical guide for researchers to report out on school district administrators efforts to develop action research for evidence-based programs, forming long-term collaborations to investigate problems of practice and solutions for improving educational systems. These partnerships are ways to bring evidence to bear on decision making for creating usable, effective innovations. The key characteristics of research-practice partnerships include a focus on problems of practice, long-term commitment, and a mutualistic relationship. For the public-school administrator, this is an opportunity to lead professional development in collaboration with university faculty and build librarians' capacity to work together for change. For the university faculty, the opportunity lies in field study of curricular innovations and scaling educational change efforts, in this case serving in an advisory role, developing a model, analyzing book purchases, and reporting out on the product.

Kachel (2018) calls school librarians to action as equity warriors in their library programs, even for those students who presumably have equal opportunities to use the library. School librarians, who work with all students and teachers in the school, can lead changes to ameliorate the effects of poverty, prejudice, and exclusion from learning opportunities, whether deliberate or unintended, to improve parity, awareness, and collaboration (Kachel, 2018).
Students need library collections which offer mirrors to reflect on their own self-identity, windows to view the perspective of others, and sliding glass doors to step out into unfamiliar worlds (Bishop, 1990). Attention to cultural markers for race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, family socioeconomic status, housing status, geographic setting/location, differentiated abilities, and language are important factors when selecting books to purchase for the school library collection (McNair, 2016). In doing so, librarians create a space for agency, growing from the student's sense of real and present value by collecting and curating wide- ranging materials to enable access to information for all (Altobelli, 2017).

Yet how do school librarians who are practicing in the field select, purchase, and curate materials for diverse learners, especially in conservative settings where push-back from parents, community, administrators, and even other teachers may be perceived as threatening? Who is setting the example for providing meaningful reading materials for marginalized children when book budgets are tight and the curricular and personal learning needs are many? How do school librarians who may have been in the field of education for many years react to efforts to diversify their collections?

To investigate, I propose the following research questions.

RQ1: How can the materials purchased by media coordinators who have not received training to reach underserved students be described in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, family socioeconomic status, housing status, geographic setting/location, differentiated abilities, and language?

RQ2: How can the professional development of school media coordinators for reaching underserved students be described?

RQ3: How do the materials purchased by media coordinators after participating an intervention of professional development to reach underserved students differ from purchases made before the intervention in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, family socioeconomic status, housing status, geographic setting/location, differentiated abilities, and language?

METHODOLOGY

Population

The population for this study will consist of three elementary school (grades PreK-5, ages 4-10 years) media coordinators, three middle school (grades 6-8, ages 11-14 years) media coordinators, three high school (grades 9-12, ages 15-18 years) media coordinators selected at random by the lead media specialist, and the district Lead Media Specialist ($N = 10$). These full-time, certified professionals practice in school libraries in one district in the southeastern United States.

Interventions

The interventions took place according to a framework provided by the district Lead Media Specialist from December 2019 to September 2020 (see Figure 1) and included professional development, readings, a guest panel, diversity tools and resources, a Canvas course, funds to purchase diverse books, discussions for purchasing and using diverse materials in school library activities, a community analysis, and a collection development plan. The need for these interventions was determined after examining the themes of media professional development offered for the five years prior to SY 2019-2020 and noting that continuing training on diversity, equity, and inclusion had not been offered (M. Hill, personal communication, July 23, 2020). The activities were selected for their relevance to the philosophy of librarianship to serve all patrons and to provide access and programming to meet the needs of all students (ALA, 2020) and to have a foundation to build upon for future trainings.

In December 2019, the district media coordinators attended a professional development meeting with a presentation on diverse award-winning books by the head of the university Teaching Resources Center. Additionally, the Lead Media Coordinator provided materials for the media coordinators to review in preparation for the panel discussion and other activities at the district January 2020 Media Professional Development meeting. An additional hour of CEU time was built into the professional development in order to provide time ahead of the meeting to read, review, and thoughtfully consider the information provided. The district media coordinators were asked to familiarize themselves with the professional development panelists by reviewing their biographies which were provided within the presentation, "Reaching Underserved Students in the School Library" in Canvas. Next, two readings were assigned to the district media coordinators (Gorski and Swalwell, 2015; Howard, Overstreet, and Ticknor, 2018). The media coordinators were asked to thoughtfully read the two articles, jot down thoughts and notes, create questions for the

panelists, and take time to think about the expertise of the panelists, the content of the articles, and the title, "Reaching Underserved Students in the School Library," and purpose of the panel discussion.

> Purpose: As librarians, we know that providing a safe, welcoming space for every single patron is a vital function in our school and in our students' lives. In this conversation, our panel of experts will share their knowledge and expertise about the specific needs of underserved populations and how we can help meet those needs in our school libraries. (M. Hill, personal communication, February 28. 2020).

The January 2020 professional development session included a panel discussion and breakout sessions in the morning. In the afternoon, a representative from Perma Bound led discussions on curated diverse book lists and the district lead media coordinator presented on the Diverse BookFinder Collection Analysis Tool (n.d.) and the Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books (Derman-Sparks, 2020) along with other diverse book selection and evaluation tools and resources.

The Diverse BookFinder Collection Analysis Tool is a free, online tool designed to help children's and school librarians diversify the picture book collection. To use, the librarian uploads a file containing ISBNs and titles for the picture book collection (including nonfiction). The Diverse BookFinder then cross-references this file with the Diverse BookFinder collection of children's picture books featuring black and indigenous people and people of color to identify multicultural picture books, then provides a report outlining which racial/cultural groups are represented and themes that predominate for each group. This approach reveals the strengths and gaps in the racial/cultural representation within the collection. The librarian can then use the Diverse BookFinder Search Tool to identify books to add to the collection to enrich picture book holdings.

From January to March 2020 the district media coordinators were asked to complete their Diverse BookFinder analysis and received $200 to purchase diverse books from a list curated by Perma Bound representatives. For the May 2020 professional development, the media coordinators were introduced to a pilot diversity tool being developed by Follett (2018) to assess the diversity of the library collection using Titlewave. The media coordinators upload MARC records from Titlewave, download the analysis, then be explore their collections by curriculum tag subjects and themes, such as race relations, LGBTQ, Hispanic American, homelessness, foster homes, or disabilities and disabled persons. Media coordinators also complete a general TitleWave analysis. Additionally, professional development for August 2020 included media coordinators conducting a community analysis using demographics and student/staff reading interest surveys. In September 2020, the media coordinators brought all analyses to the media professional development meeting to use as a basis for their collection development plans.
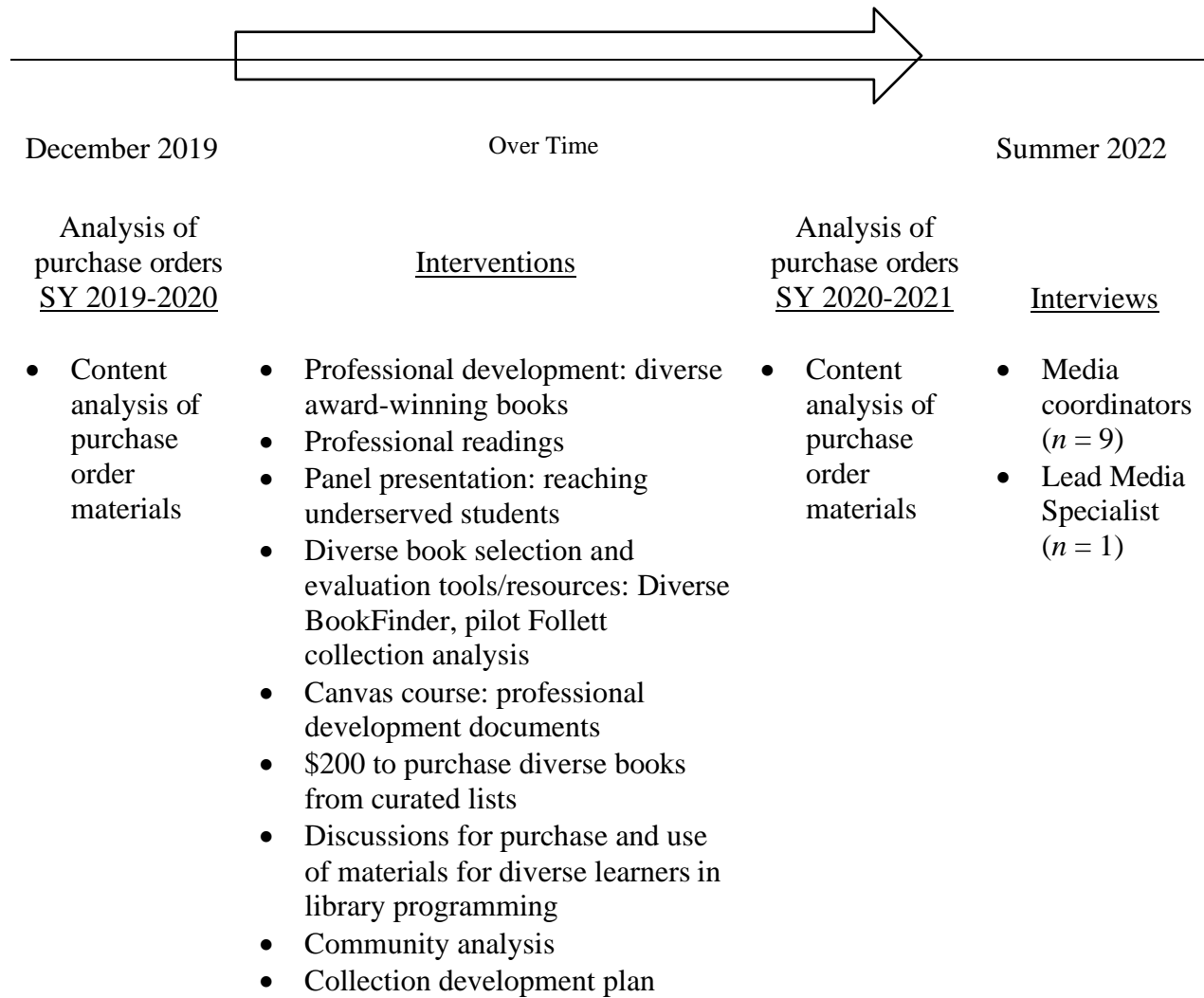
December 2019   Over Time   Summer 2022

| Analysis of purchase orders SY 2019-2020 | Interventions | Analysis of purchase orders SY 2020-2021 | Interviews |

- Content analysis of purchase order materials

- Professional development: diverse award-winning books
- Professional readings
- Panel presentation: reaching underserved students
- Diverse book selection and evaluation tools/resources: Diverse BookFinder, pilot Follett collection analysis
- Canvas course: professional development documents
- $200 to purchase diverse books from curated lists
- Discussions for purchase and use of materials for diverse learners in library programming
- Community analysis
- Collection development plan

- Content analysis of purchase order materials

- Media coordinators ($n = 9$)
- Lead Media Specialist ($n = 1$)

Figure 1. Framework

Data Collection

Copies of purchase orders placed during the year prior to the interventions for nine randomly selected schools (three elementary, three middle, three high schools) were provided to the researcher by the district lead media coordinator for content analysis at the close of the school year. Purchase orders for the year following the interventions for the same schools will also be provided at the close of the following school year. Using a small criterion sample of nine school media coordinators and one lead media specialist, qualitative data will be collected through interviews. The same three elementary, three middle school, and three high school media coordinators will be interviewed using a semi- structured format of questions developed by the researcher based on a blueprint. The lead media coordinator will also be interviewed using similar questions adapted to the lens of a district administrator. In total, ten participants representing three sites and one district will be

interviewed to explore their lived experiences. Interviews will be voice recorded and the digital files sent out for transcription.

Data Analysis

A content analysis by title of purchase orders will be completed before and after intervention. First, to describe diversity present in school library collections prior to intervention, the researcher will analyze purchase orders for SY 2019-2020 for the selected schools with the assistance of graduate assistant(s) from the local university. After the interventions are completed, the researcher will analyze purchase orders for SY 2020-2021 using the same content analysis as for the pre-intervention analysis.

Using a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of materials purchase orders before and after interventions, the researcher will identify patterns, themes and biases (Leedy and Ormrod, 2016). Content analysis will be used to look for materials characteristics by race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation of main characters, family socioeconomic status, housing status, differentiated abilities, geographic setting/location. Materials to analyze will include purchase orders of picture books, fiction, graphic novels, biography, and non-fiction by varied formats, such as print, ebooks, and other multimedia. The researcher has developed a spreadsheet to record materials characteristics. Each tab on the sheet will represent a school. Each line on the sheet will represent a book title, or case. Each column will represent a diversity characteristic. Titles will be analyzed using MARC record subject lines and Follet curriculum tags for subjects and themes. Picture books will be analyzed using the Diverse BookFinder Collection Analysis Tool. Book reviews of individual titles will also provide evidence of the diversity level of materials. As needed, copies of the books may also be accessed in the university Teacher Resource Center or school library for further review. A general analysis will look for themes, patterns, and gaps, and a diversity score on a scale of 1 to 5 will be calculated per case. Each case will be scored for diversity characteristics using a rubric developed by the researcher, then assigned an overall score.

In addition to content analysis, the researcher will analyze the interview transcriptions to determine whether/how the media coordinators changed their purchase and use of materials for diverse learners over time from pre-intervention to post intervention, and intent for change in future purchasing. The researcher will also analyze the interview transcription for the lead media specialist to determine changes she observed in the practice of the district media coordinators for purchasing, using, and discussing materials for diverse learners. The interview transcriptions will be examined for perceptions and beliefs about purchasing behaviors in the phenomenological tradition to explore the lived experiences of participants to discover and describe the strategies they enacted in practice as they engaged in book purchasing and use to reach underserved students in the school library (Hayes and Singh, 2012; McMillan and Schumacher, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). The raw interview transcripts will be generalized by recording significant statements on a matrix then evaluated to identify emerging codes to investigate the units of meaning for emergent themes through the process of horizontalization (Cresswell and Poth, 2014). Bracketing, member checking, and peer review of assigned codes and themes will be used to establish confirmability, authenticity, and trustworthiness. This analysis will provide for thick description (Geertz, 1973) of change in materials purchasing and use as a result of professional development interventions.

CONCLUSION

Research-practice partnerships open the opportunity to document action research projects using scholarly study design and reporting. In this small field study, the researcher will benefit from observation of the practices of media coordinators in the authentic school setting which will inform practice in the preparation of school librarians, while the practitioners will benefit from empirical data analysis and documentation of evidence-based practice. In this way, the partnership hopes to move forward this research-practice partnership to reach underserved students in the school library.

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