READING COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION IN THE ROLE
OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LIBRARIAN AND
STRATEGIES FOR THE PRIMARY GRADES

by

Cindy K. Spaedy

An Abstract

of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development
University of Central Missouri

July, 2012
ABSTRACT

by

Cindy K. Spaedy

The expansion of the elementary school librarian’s role has often been associated with literacy concerns and a need for improved reading instruction. In recent decades studies show the nation’s literacy level is a major concern for parents, teachers, professors, and state and national educational leaders. This study is a review of the literature regarding the role of the elementary school librarian as related to the school reading program and the need for improved instruction in reading comprehension skills. Studies indicate the librarian’s skills and position are an ideal fit for teaching reading comprehension. Many educators are supportive of such a role, but there is significant disagreement and confusion among stakeholders. Reading comprehension skills and teaching strategies are identified in this review.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary School Librarian Role Evolves</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional Role</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy Crisis</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role as Reading Teacher Emerges for the School Librarian</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Librarian as the Center of the School Reading Program</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promoting the Librarian as Central to Reading Program</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Responsibilities</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alignment with Information Standards</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Comprehension Instruction in the Library</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Comprehension Defined</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Need for Explicit Reading Comprehension Instruction</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategies for Reading Comprehension Instruction</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Comprehension in the Primary Grades</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions .......................................................................................................................... 49

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS ....................................................... 51

Factors Influencing Development of Elementary School Librarian Role .......... 51

Current Role of the Elementary School Librarian in Reading Program .......... 53

Teaching Reading Comprehension in the School Library ................................. 54

WORKS CITED ........................................................................................................................ 56
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, a decline in student reading abilities and reading habits among the American population emerged as a major concern for K-12 teachers, university professors, administrators of the ACT, state and federal level educators, lawmakers, parents, the news media, and the nation at large (Rothman 94). Rothman describes a number of studies that document the fact that literacy is in serious decline in America. He also notes that these named studies are merely a sampling of a “wide range of high profile studies” that point to the same conclusions (95). As the nation searches again for methods to improve the nation’s literacy status, the school librarian is called to become a more specifically involved partner in the school literacy program (Buzzeo 18). Buzzeo believes the librarian’s skill set is a perfect fit for improving literacy (19). However, while librarians have long accepted the inclusion of teacher in their role, not all accept the task and responsibilities of reading teacher. A 2006 state-by-state study of libraries, summarized in School Libraries Work!, describes the role of the librarian as contributing to the love of reading, promoting reading, supporting reading and literacy initiatives, and other reading related tasks, but it does not include the term reading teacher as part of the role (Hudak 10). The study does document the positive impact on student achievement made by a librarian leading a strong library media program.

Recent research has shown that the development of specific reading comprehension skills is key to improving literacy. Reading comprehension is defined as
"extracting meaning and understanding from the written word. Reading comprehension occurs when readers can correctly and fluently translate print into spoken language they can understand" (Hogan 2). Research supports the need for the explicit teaching of reading comprehension skills (Zimmerman 47).

Zimmerman (48) and other researchers (Asselin 1; Block qtd. in Zimmerman 48; Hogan 1) in the area of reading comprehension have found that these skills are not being adequately taught. It is recommended that reading comprehension be explicitly taught in all content areas, at all grade levels (Moreillon qtd. in Hudak 12; Zimmerman 47). Specific skills for reading comprehension have been identified. Studies have found that interventions and teaching of these skills can begin with children as young as two and three years old (van den Broek 264). Many in the education profession identify the skill set and position of the elementary school librarian as a fit for the librarian to be a teacher of reading comprehension skills. Coteaching and other forms of teacher and librarian collaboration are recommended (American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technology, qtd. in Montiel-Overall and Jones 50; Buzzero 19; Glick 5; Moreillon, “Position Yourself” 27). Many educators associated with the librarian profession (Buzzero 18; Glick 5; Grimes qtd. in Loertscher 46; Hudak 14; Stripling qtd. in Glick 5) recommend that stakeholders, such as classroom teachers, school administrators, teachers in the university library schools, and library associations work together to define, clarify, plan, and communicate the school librarian’s role to maximize its effectiveness in teaching reading comprehension skills and leading in the school literacy program.
**Statement of the Problem**

In recent decades, a serious decline in the reading abilities of American students (Rothman 94-95) and the reading habits of adults, especially younger adults (97), have become a major concern. In efforts to improve reading instruction, educators find reading comprehension skills are critical in making good readers. They have identified specific comprehension skills, and developed strategies and methods to use in teaching these skills (Trinkle, “Reading for Meaning” 48). The attention given to teaching reading comprehension skills is inadequate in many elementary classrooms. The role of the elementary school librarian is closely linked with the school reading program and improved reading instruction. The librarian’s skill set and position fit well with teaching reading comprehension skills. Many classroom teachers, as well as librarians, are not prepared to collaborate at this level in the teaching of reading comprehension. University school library programs have not prepared students to become teachers of reading comprehension. Clarity and agreement regarding the teaching of reading comprehension in the role of the school librarian are lacking among librarians and other educators associated with the school reading program.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to review the research literature related to the role of the elementary school librarian, how the role has changed and expanded in response to growing needs of the school reading program, and how current needs for improved literacy levels in our society and improved instruction in reading comprehension skills are influencing the expectations and tasks of the elementary school librarian. The
results of this study support the premise that the role of the elementary school librarian grew and intensified as a result of the need for improved literacy among the population; and that recent changes and expansion in the librarian role are the result of a literacy crisis, a need for improved reading instruction, and the identification of reading comprehension skills, so that an emerging role for the elementary school librarian includes reading teacher and teacher of reading comprehension skills.

**Research Questions**

To explore the current status of the elementary school librarian’s role and its relationship to reading teacher and teacher of reading comprehension skills, three questions are asked below. They are answered within the literature review.

1. What factors exist today that are influencing the development of the elementary school librarian role?

2. What is the role of the elementary school librarian at this time regarding the school reading program and the teaching of reading?

3. How does the librarian teach reading comprehension in the library?

**Limitations of the Study**

This literature review is limited by its scope, time, and available resources. In some respects, more information was available on a topic than could be used in the scope of this paper and the process of choosing the most relevant information may have caused some important pieces to be left out. In one respect, information on the teaching of reading comprehension skills, especially in the primary years, was limited by finding only a few pieces of relevant information. Time was also limited when
considering the learning acquired in the process of writing a paper and the lack of time to apply it to reorganization or other improvement at a later time.

**Definition of Terms**

Terms used within this study that may not be clear to the reader are listed here with an explanation of the term to allow for greater ease and understanding in reading.

The American College Testing (ACT) program - A national college admissions examination that consists of subject area tests in English, mathematics, reading, and science (Popham 327).

Accelerated Reader (AR) program - A daily progress monitoring software assessment in wide use by primary and secondary schools for monitoring the practice of reading (Woolls 185).

American Association of School Librarians - A division of the American Library Association that represents the interests of library media specialists at the national level and provides critical services to support lifelong learning (American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology 125).

Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) - A professional association of thousands of educators and others whose activities are directed toward improving instruction through technology (AECT).

National Education Association – the largest professional organization and largest labor union in the United States, representing public school teachers and other support
personnel, faculty, and staffers at colleges and universities, retired educators, and college students preparing to become teachers (Woolls 227).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – 2002 federal legislation that enacts the theories of standards-based education (Popham 16).

**Research Design**

This study was based on the review of professional literature related to the role of the elementary school librarian as well as literature related to reading instruction at the elementary school level, especially instruction on reading comprehension skills and reading instruction in the library. Search terms used when seeking literature for this study include “role of the librarian,” “reading comprehension,” “reading in the primary grades,” “teacher-librarian,” and “reading teacher in the library.”

Many articles were retrieved from the online databases, accessed through the Web site of the James C. Kirkpatrick Library at the University of Central Missouri. The databases used include *Academic Search Complete*, *Central Search*, and *Education Research Complete*. First articles for the study were selected based on the search terms. As articles related to the topic were obtained, some additional articles and books identified in their bibliographies were obtained and used. The information obtained from some of these materials proved to be more specific and valuable. Several books related to teaching reading comprehension in the library were obtained from the Daniel Boone Regional Library in Columbia and Ellis Library at the University of Missouri, Columbia. Several publications by the American Library Association were helpful in providing background information related to standards and teaching recommendations of official
professional organizations representing the elementary school librarian and others such as the American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Education Communications and Technology. These publications include Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians; Crosswalk of the Common Core Standards and the Standards for the 21st-Century Learner; Standards For The 21st-Century Learner In Action; and Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning. The reading materials provided information that allowed the creation of an outline for writing and the formulation of questions to be answered about the topic.

Conclusion

The role of the elementary school librarian has expanded and changed over time. Changes and expansion have often been fueled by the literacy concerns of society, especially educators, and the desire to improve reading instruction, most recently in reading comprehension skills. The elementary school librarian role as partner in the school reading program is now accepted by most educators. The added role of reading teacher is generally accepted at this time. The inclusion of teacher of reading comprehension skills is emerging, and is recommended by some, accepted by some, and resisted by some. Leaders in library and librarian organizations, university library schools, classroom teacher and school administrator groups are among those positioned to affect change in the librarian role.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

My research explores how the literacy crisis (Rothman 2) has intensified the role of elementary school librarian to one in which the librarian is actively involved in reading comprehension instruction. The research will first consider the school librarian’s traditional role and the needs and insights that called for reading teacher to be included in that role. The research also describes an emerging role for the elementary school librarian to be central in the school reading program. New expectations, responsibilities, and skills needed are described as the role focuses more on improved reading instruction. Reading comprehension instruction in the library is explored. Reading comprehension is defined. The need for specific reading comprehension instruction and strategies for teaching reading comprehension are reviewed. There is discussion of reading comprehension in the primary grades and reading comprehension instruction in the library.

Elementary School Librarian Role Evolves

Since its establishment in the middle 19th century, the role of the librarian has continuously grown and expanded. Changes were often the result of perceived crises in the level of literacy within the population. Still evolving, the role of reading comprehension instruction is seen in the expanding role of the school librarian in 2012. To better understand the emerging vision for the school librarian, this section reviews the traditional role of the librarian, how concerns about the reading skills and habits of
people across the nation fueled the evolution of the role, and how an ongoing focus on improving reading skills tapped the librarian to be a reading teacher.

**Traditional Role**

The story of the school librarian in American education goes back as far as 1793 when Benjamin Franklin proposed an Academy with a library. In its earliest stage, the role of the librarian was regarded as a school custodian or clerk for a depository of certain volumes of books, a role which required little preparatory education. In the decades between the 1830s and the 1870s, a few school district libraries were established (Cole 87).

During this time American educators sought new approaches to teaching reading. This search established an early connection to the need for more reading material and library services in the elementary school. As the school library came to be seen as an aid in classroom instruction and a source for leisurely reading, some schools appointed a professional librarian whose qualifications were less than that of a teacher (90). In 1896, the establishment of a School Library Section as part of the National Education Association opened the door for greater development of school libraries and an official status for the role of the school librarian. In 1900 Miss Mary Kingsbury became the first library school graduate and the first trained librarian employed on a full time basis (90).

Since 1913, other factors that supported the growth of school libraries during this time were the increase in school population, curriculum expansion, and changing education objectives. Founders of the American Library Association (ALA) worked
tirelessly to promote extensive library services throughout the country. In 1914 the ALA added a School Library Section (90). The ALA publication, *Library Journal*, was the first of its kind and continues to make a significant contribution to the development of libraries. However, although the number of high school libraries grew rapidly, the expansion of elementary school libraries was much slower (90). By 1959 a few centralized elementary school libraries existed. Book collections for elementary students were primarily housed in classrooms. A collection of fifty books per room was considered to be adequate (91). In the decades since that time, the elementary classroom book collections were gradually moved to a centralized site.

In the past 10 years, various professionals have weighed in on the topic of the school librarian’s role. In 2002, Mike Eisenberg, Dean of the Information School of the University of Washington in Seattle, considered the role to have three components: teaching information literacy to students and staff, reading advocate, and information manager for print and electronic resources (47). Also in 2002, Montiel-Overall and Jones (51) noted considerable interest within the library profession to promote the teaching role of school librarians. They reported, however, that teachers perceive librarians to be mainly a source of information about book collections and other resources to support the curriculum. They are not perceived to be instructional partners in planning and teaching (53). Toni Buzzeo (18) describes the traditional role of the elementary school librarian as reviewing, buying, cataloging, shelving, circulating, and even dusting books, purveyors of books, and a nearly invisible element in literacy.
However, an author and career librarian, Buzzeo states this role is no longer current and today the librarian must be a partner in literacy (18).

*School Libraries Work!* is a Research Foundation Paper summarizing state-by-state findings on the value of school libraries and librarians published by the U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, first released in 2004. This research paper, most recently updated in 2008, includes the findings of school library studies in 19 states. The paper describes mounting evidence from two decades of empirical research “school libraries staffed by certified library media specialists do make a measurable difference on school achievement” (1) Tina Hudak refers to the 2006 edition of *School Libraries Work!* that describes the role of the school librarian as one who contributes to the love of reading, promotes reading, supports reading and literacy initiatives, and supports learning to read and reading to learn with informational and imaginative texts and literature (10). Hudak finds it significant that nowhere in the study’s document is the term reading teacher applied to the role of the librarian. Hudak also notes the common agreement that there is an inextricable link between libraries and reading. Librarians have long accepted the role of teacher, teaching students to use online catalogs and databases; evaluating reliable Web sites; searching for books of interest by the same author or similar themes; searching a book for the table of contents, indices, correct titles, headings and pages; and finding primary sources and secondary sources. Hudak says the librarian role has advanced to include hosting book fairs, hosting book authors and illustrators, being the reading advocate in all events, designing Web sites, and teaching online search strategies and the use of software
programs (10). She describes the lack of agreement among library professionals, university library school faculty, and school administrators on the role of the school librarian as reading teacher as a matter of concern (12). Hudak questions how the librarian’s profession can remain strong without a defined stance regarding the librarian as reading teacher (14).

**Literacy Crisis**

Educators’ focus on improving reading instruction in the 1870s highlighted the need for more library books and services, expanding the role of the librarian. In recent decades, major concerns about literacy again positioned the school librarian as the solution for existing reading problems. It will take time to bring librarians, university faculty, and school administrators to an agreement about today’s ever-expanding role of the librarian in the school’s reading program. Why is the role of reading teacher being considered for the school librarian in 2012?

The reported decline in the nation’s literacy level is a major concern to parents, teachers, professors, and state and national educational leaders. David J. Rothman, former K-12 teacher and current university teacher, describes studies that document that literacy is in serious decline in America (94). Rothman defines literacy as the ability to construe complex symbol systems (96). He questions how a democracy can operate when its citizens forsake the written word. Rothman says teachers in K-12 education are well aware of the situation. He suggests that many of his higher education colleagues do not recognize the enormity of the problem. He encourages them to respond to this trend with courage to make a difference, to go outside their usual roles
to help develop literacy in young children. Rothman emphasizes the extent of the research, “The data is so convincing and comes from so many sources that it trumps any particular narrative. What follows is merely a sample of a wide range of recent high-profile studies that all point to similar conclusions” (95).

Among the supporting studies Rothman identifies is a 2006 survey conducted by Maguire Associates for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The survey reported 65% of high school teachers and 84% of higher education faculty say high school graduates are less than well prepared to seek a college degree (95). An ACT study released in 2006, titled *Reading Between the Lines: What the ACT Reveals about College Readiness in Reading*, reports that only about half of the 2005 high school graduates who took the ACT are ready for college level reading, achieving the lowest scores in ten years (95). The following year, 2006, the College Board released SAT results showing the largest decline in the past 31 years (96). Rothman says his cited studies are representative of many more. ACT says the state standards in high school reading are insufficient or do not exist at all. They make specific recommendations for raising them, recommending standards that call for students to study and read aloud complex texts. ACT also calls for more high school teachers to teach reading skills and strategies, and for teachers to have higher expectations (95-96).

Another significant and influential study, *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, was conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 2004. This report is based on a study of the reading habits of Americans and draws on previous NEA studies over many decades. Rothman points out that this study does not
result from the work of bureaucrats (97). He thanks Mark Bauerlein, professor of English at Emory and director of the NEA’s Office of Research and Analysis at the time of the study, “for bringing us the grim news of this report with such clarity and precision” (97). *Reading at Risk* presents the reading habits of 17,000 adults in every possible demographic group. Comparing their results with previous studies over many decades to determine long-term trends, NEA reported that voluntary literary reading, including any kind of poem, drama, or fiction with no judgment about the quality, shows long-term declines in every single demographic group (qtd. in Rothman 97).

Debra Lau Whelan, in “Librarians Respond to Decline in Reading,” says that most Americans were shocked when the *Reading at Risk* survey found that 18- to 24-year-olds’ rate of decline in literary reading was 55% higher than that of the total adult population (17). Whelan reports that librarians have known this for decades. Bauerlein, project manager of the 2004 NEA report, notes that this younger adult population, who will be 28 to 34 years old in 2014, will likely pass their own apathetic reading habits to their children (qtd. in Whelan 17). Rothman believes the decline in verbal literacy will affect desired progress in math and science and other subjects, since the basic competencies of many subjects are closely related to literacy skills (96).

Dana Gioia, chair of the NEA at the time of the study, says there are more concerns than just reading. According to Gioia, the study shows that readers are more active and involved in their communities. The reading decline parallels the decline in participation in civic and cultural matters, negatively affecting literature, all arts, volunteerism, philanthropy, and political engagement (qtd. in Rothman 97).
Bauerlein, in “A Very Long Disengagement,” asserts that a separate set of numerous recent studies show that college students spend more and more time engaged in commercial electronic media for many hours each day (qtd. in Rothman 100). Neil Postman, in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, analyzes how commercial electronic media actually work. He says that the logic of commercial electronic media will “relentlessly and inescapably transform everything it touches, destroying traditional notions of literacy as one of its byproducts” (qtd. in Rothman 100). Rothman concludes that “the situation of literacy in America – particularly among young people – is gradually becoming dire, transforming the entire country before our very eyes…a slowly unfolding collapse in literacy…a crisis in education (100).” He quotes Mother Teresa, “We can do no great things, only small things with love,” as he challenges universities, professors, and academic organizations to take creative action. To stem the tide, Rothman recommends professors devote some time to teaching outside the college classroom, working to improve students’ reading skills before they go to college, in K-12 public schools, in summer schools dealing with improving student literacy, at story hour at the public library, in the education program at the public theater (100), or in other appropriate places where the professor finds an opportunity to be part of the solution for the literacy concern.

**Role as Reading Teacher Emerges for the School Librarian**

Serious concerns about the reading skills and abilities of students, as well as a decline in adult reading habits over a period of time, led to the proposal of a new role for the librarian, that of reading teacher. Poor test scores and undesirable research results
in recent decades led to new state standards, new emphasis on test scores, high stakes testing, and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Major literacy concerns were also expressed in schools, homes, and in the news. Soon teachers and other responsible parties began to look for more effective approaches to reading instruction. Some began to see a reading teacher dimension in the school librarian’s role to be a logical answer to improved reading instruction.

Hudak believes clarity about the role of the school librarian as a reading teacher is important to a broad group of educators. However, there is significant disagreement among and between teachers in the university library school, library associations, creators of reading and library standards, and library practitioners. Some believe that librarians need to be literacy leaders and teachers of reading. Others either believe the appropriate role is only as supporters of the reading program (11-12), or they may not address the issue at all when they write about the role of the school librarian.

Judi Moreillon, author, 20-year veteran classroom teacher, teaching librarian, literacy coach, teacher-educator, and an adjunct professor, is one who supports the addition of reading teacher to the librarian role. Moreillon explains her opinion on the topic of librarian as a reading teacher in these words: “Reading is meaning making. Decoding is a foundation for reading. Decoding is best taught in the classroom by an educator who monitors individual progress. Reading comprehension, however, is taught in all content areas, at all grade levels, and teacher-librarians are perfectly positioned to be teachers of reading comprehension” (qtd. in Hudak 12). In “Position Yourself at the Center: Coteaching Reading Comprehension Strategies,” Moreillon says the overlap
between teacher standards and the standards for librarians shows that the responsibility for teaching reading comprehension skills should be shared (28).

Sharon Grimes, author of *Reading is Our Business*, says it is not enough for the librarian to place emphasis on access to great reading materials or the enjoyment of reading. Grimes suggests the program faculty in university library schools consider preparing school librarians to also be reading teachers (qtd. in Loertscher 46). In describing strategies for librarians to use in teaching reading skills to kindergartners, Barbara Braxton says we need to remember that we are all always teachers of reading (53). Sterl Artley, a noted reading educator at the University of Missouri-Columbia, constantly emphasized that every teacher is a teacher of reading. However, agreement on the appropriate transitions in the librarian’s role regarding the inclusion of instruction in reading comprehension cannot be expected to occur quickly or easily. There are many groups to be informed and convinced.

Problems and concerns exist regarding clarification and agreement on the role of the librarian as a reading teacher. The 2006 study by the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science describes the numerous roles of the librarian but does not include the librarian as a reading teacher. Hudak describes the position of an outstanding school librarian with 24 years experience who states, “I do not teach reading. My role in teaching reading is that of a consultant to the reading teachers. I like to think I complement what they do” (1).

Montiel-Overall and Jones, at the School of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona, notes the significant interest within the library
profession and among faculty at some universities to promote teaching in the role of the school librarian through greater collaboration with teachers (51). They also refer to the number of studies confirming the importance of teachers working closely with the school librarian on curriculum planning and implementation to improve student achievement (51). However, they express concern that the higher level collaborative practices recommended in the 1998 edition of Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning (American Association of School Librarians & Association of Educational Communications and Technology) suggest a more central role for school librarians in planning, teaching, and evaluating students. Montiel-Overall and Jones believe the teaching role for the school librarian as described in Information Power is mostly unknown among teachers as a practice recommended for librarians.

The results of a study of teacher perceptions conducted by Montiel-Overall and Jones in 2009 (55-68) indicated that teachers generally do not perceive school librarians to be involved in teaching to the level recommended in Information Power. Almost half of the teachers indicated they never worked with school librarians in teaching, planning, or evaluating students’ progress (69). Research by Muronaga and Harada in 1999 indicates that shifting the role of school librarian into a higher-level teaching role is complex and evolutionary (qtd. in Montiel-Overall and Jones 51). Montiel-Overall and Jones say this requires certain factors to be in place. One of these important factors is that teachers must recognize the role of the librarian as a teaching partner (51). In addition, the existing research on this topic is widely published in the literature of the library profession, but is not found in the education literature (51). Thus,
while some librarians may be thinking librarian as reading teacher is a helpful idea to teachers and students, many teachers are not aware of this thinking.

Jamie McKenzie (14), a former superintendent, principal, teacher, director of libraries, media and technology, and current editor of monthly publication *From Now On*–*The Educational Technology Journal* is a strong voice for information literacies. McKenzie says that the national education law, No Child Left Behind, created pressures, risks, and opportunities for the school librarian. He sees the librarian as one who has now become a critical factor in the survival of schools. McKenzie says this is especially true as schools work to strengthen reading comprehension in all classrooms and disciplines (14).

In 2007 the ALA included the question of whether librarians are reading teachers at their Pre-Winter Institute for the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). The importance of the topic was demonstrated by the fact that the topic of reading and the school librarian was scheduled for extensive discussion (Hudak 10). No significant action resulted from this meeting and the discussion continues today.

Buzzeo notes that some librarians strongly resist the call to be a teacher of reading skills (19). Buzzeo clearly sees that basic literacy must be the foundation of the primary grades. She is fully aware that there is a heightened urgency about literacy. She understands that test scores and accountability have taken on a new importance. She believes the librarian’s role of providing resources is the crucial backbone in improving reading skills. However, she does not suggest that the librarian join the school reading team by becoming a reading teacher. Buzzeo believes that librarians
should be partners in literacy and the heart of the reading program. She offers five aspects (18-19) of the librarian’s changing role in literacy. The first three are advanced versions of the traditional roles of building collections, cheerleading and promoting the love of reading, and creating and leading a joyful reading environment and literacy center. In the fourth and fifth aspects, she supports collaboration with teachers to help them design units that include literacy learning. Buzzeo concludes that literacy is a perfect arena for the librarian’s skill set (19).

Hudak (14) addresses the concern of uncertainty among her profession regarding the reading teacher role of the librarian. She says that the library profession needs to know where they stand regarding the teaching of reading because they cannot remain strong as a profession without greater unity regarding this issue. She proposes that librarians practice what they preach, go through the processes required to reach the right answer, and make the change when necessity demands. Barbara Stripling, director of library services for New York City’s public schools, co-facilitated a literacy challenge group whose action plan prioritized defining roles for the school librarian. Stripling noted the necessity of this because of the lack of consensus even within their challenge group of what the school librarian roles are (qtd. in Glick 5). In spite of a broad array of differences of opinion among stakeholders, some practitioners and some university teachers are taking steps forward. The role of the librarian as reading teacher, central to the school reading program, is clearly emerging.
**Librarian as the Center of the School Reading Program**

The role described by the proponents of the school librarian as the center of the school reading program is filled with both responsibilities and opportunities. As expectations expand and change, it can be seen that the transitions required of the librarian are extensive. For the purpose of a more clear discussion in this section, the concept of reading skills is separated into two parts. The first part is the process of decoding. Another part of the reading skill set involves using the decoding skills to make meaning and understanding of what students read (Loertscher 46). In “Position Yourself,” Moreillon says reading comprehension is finding meaning and understanding in what has been decoded (27). Throughout this discussion of learning to read, teaching reading, and being at the center of the school reading program, the term reading will include decoding and reading comprehension but will also refer to additional specific reading skills.

Discussion of the promotion of the school librarian and the library media center as central to the school reading program are included in this section. The professional responsibilities of the librarian as related to the school reading program are identified. The responsibilities of educating others about the expanding role of the librarian, collaborating with teachers and the reading specialist, understanding the research, and aligning information standards are discussed.

**Promoting the Librarian as Central to Reading Program**

The position of the school librarian and the library media center as central to the school literacy program is encouraged by many stakeholders in the librarian profession.
There are varying degrees of agreement among groups. Viewpoints of librarian practitioners, library school professors, school administrators, library associations, and school support groups are presented. Judi Moreillon is a literacies and libraries consultant who teaches as an adjunct assistant professor at the School of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona. In “position yourself,” Moreillon says librarians have too long stood on the edges of the school literacy team. They perform an unlimited number of librarian roles but do not step into actual reading instruction. If the goal of students, teachers, administrators, and librarians is to make students effective users of ideas and information, then it makes sense for the librarian to step to the center of the literacy program and become a leader in reading instruction (27). This Age of Accountability requires school librarians to be full participants on the school literacy team. Moreillon calls for the librarian and the classroom teacher to team teach and coteach reading comprehension strategies (32). With two adults facilitating learning in the classroom, both can benefit from reciprocal mentoring and improvement in instructional practices. The educators can align standards and develop a shared vocabulary that benefits students. Administrators and teacher colleagues can see how the librarian contributes to the school literacy program (32).

Toni Buzzeo is a career school librarian, an author of five picture books and seven professional books, and a member of the Maine Association of School Libraries Executive Board. Buzzeo says the school librarian has too often been left out of the loop when it comes to literacy (18). Keith Curry Lance, in a 2004 article, “Libraries and Student Achievement,” refers to the potential for the school librarian to positively impact
students’ reading scores by 10-18% (qtd. in Buzzeo 18). Buzzeo says the librarian should join the reading team by improving the library program to maximize the gains in student test scores, and then communicate the librarian’s positive impact on reading skills to their community (18).

Jamie McKenzie is a strong voice for information literacies in this time of technology. McKenzie says the library media center thrives when the librarian is the most capable teacher of comprehension skills in the school. This is especially true if she can teach these skills to others in the school (14). Tina Hudak is the media specialist in the computer lab for the Lower School at St. Albans School for Boys in Washington, DC. In discussing the role of the librarian in the school reading program, Hudak says that we know strong school library programs positively impact student achievement (10). She refers to the state-by-state study report, summarized in School Libraries Work!, that documents the positive impact on student achievement made by a strong library media program when led by a strong librarian (10). Hudak notes the mission of the school is to teach reading. She calls upon library professionals to specifically and clearly articulate their support of the school’s reading program to school administrators (14).

Barbara Stripling, Assistant Professor of Practice at Syracuse University and formerly of Chattanooga’s Public Education Foundation, comments on the positive results of a library program used in this district. The local Library Power Program, directed by Stripling during the years of 1994 through 1998, and used in a Chattanooga elementary school, has shown a direct correlation in students’ use of the library and
their test scores in reading comprehension and reference skills. The elementary school librarian compared the state assessment results to the number of times students had visited the library during the year. The principal shared the information with teachers to show that “the kids didn’t go to the library just to check out books, but to learn how to learn” (61).

**Professional Responsibilities**

The professional responsibilities of the school librarian, as related to reading, are described in a variety of sources. The roles and responsibilities of the librarian have been addressed by school library associations, librarian practitioners, and university professors in the library school. Current descriptions of the school librarian role contain traditional responsibilities as well as updated expectations.

The 2010 American Library Association/American Association of School Librarians *Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians* were approved on October 24, 2010, by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education’s Specialty Areas Studies Board. This set of standards contains five areas: Teaching for Learning, Literacy and Reading, Information and Knowledge, Advocacy and Leadership, and Program Management and Administration. Each standard is followed by a rubric for use by reviewers, research that supports the standard, and references. The traditional responsibilities of the librarian are included in the 2010 recommendations and guidelines for the school librarian.

The 1998 edition of *Information Power: Building Partnerships in Learning* served as a respected source of guidelines for the roles of the school librarian. In *Information*
Power the school librarian is responsible for a library media program based on collaboration, leadership, and technology. The librarian’s specific responsibilities are found within four areas: teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator (American Association of School Libraries & Association for Educational Communications and Technology 4-5). The traditional responsibilities of the librarian continue to be found in the advanced 2010 recommendations and guidelines for the school librarian. Several listed sets of school librarian responsibilities are available from the library profession and are discussed below.

In February 2009, the Board of the American Association of School Librarians adopted a position statement regarding the school librarian's role in the school reading program. The position statement defines up-to-date professional responsibilities related to reading for the 21st-century school librarian that "position school librarians in leadership roles in developing reading comprehension strategies and in promoting free independent reading" (American Association of School Librarians, “Position Statement on the School Librarian’s Role in Reading” 1-2). The position statement describes the following responsibilities (1-2): providing open access at the point of need; guaranteeing student needs are met by developing policies and practices with the least possible restrictions on their choices of resources and access to them; building diverse collections in regard to language, social class, gender, race, and sexual orientation to help students develop an informed worldview and prepare them to be part of a global society; providing captivating events and projects, such as literacy celebrations, Children’s Book Week, and others for students and colleagues; collaborating with
teachers to integrate literature and information in all genres and formats into the curriculum; advocating for the use of alternative texts for students, such as magazines, graphic novels, audio- and e-book editions of novels to assist readers with diverse learning styles and preferences to achieve high levels of literacy; integrating resources in all formats, co-planning and co-teaching reading comprehension strategy lessons to empower all students to be successful in their learning; understanding the research related to reading; reading the publications of education associations to keep up with research and trends; sharing journals and articles with classroom teacher and reading specialist colleagues to promote shared understandings; subscribing to RSS feeds; following and participating in the blogs of education and technology leaders; and attending workshop and conferences with colleagues to build one’s own skills.

A set of professional responsibilities for the school librarian written from the practitioner’s point of view is found in “Literacy and the Changing Role of the Elementary Library Media Specialist” (Buzzeo 18). Buzzeo references literacy concerns, raising test scores, and being the heart of the reading program as her targets. Her listing of librarian responsibilities promotes the affective dimension of reading, to instill a love of books and reading in students. The first of her five aspects is “Builder of Quality Collections for the Library Media Center and the Classroom”, described as collections that support curricular content areas and the personal reading interests of students as part of effort to improve reading skills. Proposing a wealth of reading material, Buzzeo envisions collections by which students are positively affected: the books are new; appeal to the students’ personal interests; are self-selected, are matched to the reading
level as well as the child’s experience, knowledge, interests and passions; will make the reader think and grow; and have intellectual and emotional riches worth discovering (18).

Buzzeo’s second aspect, although familiar, is tailored for the changing role: “Chief Cheerleader and Promoter of the Love of Reading.” This encouragement is especially needed when intense literacy efforts might sap student’s joy or hide the flame under a barrel of accountability. Buzzeo sees the librarian’s responsibility as helping the student find books they will love and want to read, not only decoding the words but finding and loving the treasures they offer (18).

The third aspect is “Creator and Leader of a Joyful Reading Environment and Literacy Center.” Buzzeo is concerned with this time of great literacy focus. She proposes a motivational factor that includes physical space that is bright, cheerful, comfortable, and inviting, with an intrinsic atmosphere of excitement, possibility, wonder, and with an emphasis on plenty of books. Working to draw people into the library space, she recommends book talks and clubs, author visits, reader’s choice programs, and other activities to provide opportunities to tell students and others about the exciting books in her literacy center (19).

The fourth aspect, “Collaborative Partner and Knowledgeable Teacher,” leads us to look at teacher collaboration as one of the most important responsibilities of the school librarian. Buzzeo refers to the librarian’s role as collaborating with classroom teachers and specialists, but she acknowledges controversy over what can and should be done in literacy instruction. She suggests the librarian look to other librarians who
have been elementary classroom teachers. She believes these librarians can share natural ways for the librarian to support reading while at the same time teaching literacy skills through collaboration with classroom teachers (19).

It is the fifth and last aspect, “Designer of Collaborative Literacy Engagements,” that Buzzeo says is the most important. She calls attention to the intense focus collaboration is receiving throughout the educational arena. In an effort to encourage teachers and help them stay focused on their students as thinkers rather than exceptional memorizers, Buzzeo says the librarian should help teachers think of school librarians as partners (19). Buzzeo has not been captivated by the librarian role as a teacher of reading comprehension, but her discussion supports a strong role for the librarian in the school reading program. She is devoted to the whole child and the importance of loving to read over an entire lifetime.

Nancy Zimmerman, an associate professor with the School of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC, says it is a prime ongoing responsibility of the school librarian to teach students to make wise, challenging book selections that will lead to their growth as readers. She describes the school librarian as the reader’s advisor. The librarian knows quality materials, the collection, the literature, the curriculum, the teachers, and the students (49).

Educating others about the expanding role of the school librarian as central to the school reading program is a foundational responsibility of the librarian. Nancy Zimmerman suggests that the librarian actively promote the reading services of the library media center. She must be visible in the library and throughout the school
community, collaborating with students, teachers, administrators, and parents (49). Montiel-Overall and Jones say the librarian must fully describe to teachers the changing role of librarians as teachers and instructional partners, as explained in Information Power. She must actively seek to educate teachers, principals, and governing school boards about the teaching role of the school librarian (71).

Montiel-Overall and Jones name collaboration between school librarians and teachers in reading as an important responsibility of the school librarian (52). Numerous studies in the past 10 years have indicated that student achievement is improved by teacher and school librarian collaboration (50). Although the existing research is widely published in the literature of the library profession, it is not found in the education literature (51). One study found that the partnering between classroom teachers and the librarian as described in Information Power is new to many teachers and almost unknown to others (51). Thus, though librarians may be thinking librarian as reading teacher is a helpful idea to teachers and students, many teachers are not aware of this thinking. Buzzeo considers teacher collaboration as something that can always be depended on to enhance learning and teacher success (19). Yet, none of the sets of the school librarian's responsibilities previously listed is clear about exactly what collaboration means regarding the teaching of reading.

Ulmer, Truett, and Matzen (18) describe a unique collaborative relationship in a middle school between the librarian and a reading teacher hired as an instructional coach. The reading teacher coaches students for math and reading improvement, but observes that reading is fundamental to both areas. The librarian helps teachers with
the Accelerated Reading Program but through thoughtful book arrangements encourages students to select books outside the program. The location of the office of the reading teacher in the library media center promotes dialogue and brainstorming that leads to collaboration between the two educators. The librarian finds and recommends publishers, authors, summarizing state-by-state findings on the value of school libraries and librarians and specific books that provide high interest, low reading level books for middle school students in various subjects. Together they select and order books for the library that the reading teacher believes will help the poor and reluctant reader. The librarian says he cannot keep low reading level sports biographies, mystery series, picture books, and other books of interest to middle schoolers on the shelves. The team effort between the librarian and the reading teacher promotes their common objective of enhancing the literacy skills and reading scores, not only of the struggling reader, but also of all readers. It is an example of successful collaboration of teacher and librarian for the purpose of improved reading abilities and enjoyment.

Examples similar to this collaborative partnership could be found in many schools. However, in some schools collaborative activities between teachers and the librarian are not pursued because the collaborative concept and strategies for implementing a partnership are not clear. While collaboration between the school librarian and the classroom teacher is valued, the meaning of collaboration will need to be clarified (Buzzeo 19, Glick 6, Montiel-Overall and Jones 51), agreed upon to a
greater degree than exists at this time, and effectively communicated to everyone involved.

Alignment with Information Standards

In “Position Yourself,” Moreillon identifies another responsibility of the school librarian as the center of the school reading program to be aligning the information literacy standards with reading comprehension standards (32). In “Reading and the Library Program,” Moreillon says a school librarian must be skilled at integrating standards and aligning learning objectives from many disciplines (28). This alignment can be helpful to teachers and the librarian in improving reading instruction.

One resource to assist the school librarian with aligning learning objectives and integrating literacy standards is the American Association of School Librarians Standards for the 21st-Century Learner. In “Reading for Meaning,” Trinkle says this AASL resource uses reading instructional vocabulary already familiar to teachers and is not just something new for teachers to learn and do. She identifies this AASL vocabulary as prior knowledge, questioning, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, information organization, self-monitoring, genres, broad and fluent reading to make connections with self, the world, and previous reading (48). Trinkle compares students making connections between information and their own knowledge and experience to teachers using these standards to connect the classroom curriculum to already established standards. She says this AASL resource provides tremendous help to school librarians when they are trying to tailor students’ instruction to their needs (50). Another AASL resource, Standards for the 21st Century Learner in Action, provides support for the
school librarian and others as they teach to the standards (10). Action examples, divided into grade-level sections by benchmark grades 2, 5, 8, 10, and 12, help to put the standards into practice (62-117).

A 2010 publication from American Association of School Librarians is *Crosswalk of the Common Core Standards and the Standards for the 21st Century Learner*. This is a resource for school librarians to learn how the AASL *Standards for the 21st Century Learner* align with the Common Core State Standards. The crosswalk addresses English Language Arts, Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Reading Standards for Literacy in Science and Technical Subjects, and Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. An example from the English Language Arts area (American Association of School Librarians, *Crosswalk of Common Core Standards* 1) aligns the kindergarten AASL standard, “Use prior and background knowledge as context for new learning,” with the Common Core Standard, “Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on reading and content.” The *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner Lesson Plan Database* includes lesson plans with an automatic crosswalk between the AASL learning standards and the Common Core State Standards.

**Reading Comprehension Instruction in the Library**

As concern grows about the literacy level of students and the general population, the role of the school librarian continues to expand. School librarians providing reading comprehension instruction is seen as a highly promising way of addressing the problem.
Although the majority of research and development of teaching programs related to reading comprehension and strategies are directed at classroom teachers and reading specialists, the librarian is also responsible for teaching reading comprehension strategies (Zimmerman 47). Many educators recommend the role of the school librarian as a teacher of reading comprehension. In this section, the definition of reading comprehension will be examined. The need for explicit reading comprehension instruction and a reading comprehension instructional specialist will be considered. Reading comprehension in the primary grades will be explored. The need for greater preparation of the school librarian to teach reading comprehension will be considered. There will be a consideration of reading comprehension in the primary grades. Then reading comprehension instruction in the library will be discussed.

**Reading Comprehension Defined**

A clear understanding of the specific term reading comprehension is critical to understanding the concerns about a crisis in literacy and to identifying solutions for improving student reading skills. A number of definitions of reading comprehension can be found in the literature. Reading comprehension is defined by the RAND Reading Study Group in 2002 as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language (Zimmerman 47). Another definition comes from Hogan, who says “reading comprehension is extracting meaning and understanding from the written word. Reading comprehension occurs when readers can correctly and fluently translate print into spoken language they can
understand” (2). In “Position Yourself,” Moreillon defines reading comprehension as the student making sense of what he or she reads (27).

All parties involved agree that decoding should be taught by classroom teachers and reading specialists who are trained to teach this skill and monitor individual progress. Reading comprehension is what school librarians are being called upon to teach. Fredericks says comprehension is the central goal of reading instruction. It is based on being able to make sense of printed materials. Comprehension goes beyond one’s ability to remember details or recall factual information (43).

The Need for Explicit Reading Comprehension Instruction

Much effort is being applied to identifying ways to improve reading skills and habits for students. Research has identified explicit reading comprehension instruction to be key in improving the reading skills of students. Joyce says reading comprehension helps students understand and remember what they read and contributes to problem solving and decision making (36). More than thirty years ago a study of reading instruction found that reading comprehension as a reading skill was taught less than 1% of the time. This teaching was usually just a mention and did not include actual explanation or demonstration. Asselin says that in spite of much research and professional development over the next 20 years, comprehension instruction in the classroom was still found to be inadequate (1). As recently as November 2011, Hogan says the teaching of skilled reading comprehension is still being ignored (1). Skilled reading comprehension is critical for everyday life, educational success, productivity in society, and almost any type of employment (1). Much attention is being given to
understanding what reading comprehension involves and what measures can be taken to improve this critical set of skills.

Research provides new information and strategies that show promise for improving reading comprehension. In “Position Yourself,” Moreillon cites research studies indicating that reading comprehension strategies should be explicitly taught and modeled at all grade levels (28). The RAND Reading Study Group also emphasizes the importance of teachers teaching comprehension explicitly, beginning in the primary grades and continuing through high school (qtd. in Zimmerman 48). Hudak recommends that reading comprehension be taught in all content areas. She believes school librarians are positioned to assume that teaching role (12).

Nancy Zimmerman in her article, “Research-based Evidence: The Role of the Library Media Specialist in Reading Comprehension Instruction”, refers to the increase of published research concerning the need for explicit reading comprehension instruction (47-49). She notes that in spite of this growing knowledge base about instruction designed to increase the reading comprehension of students, teachers still do not spend enough time on comprehension instruction in the elementary and upper grades (47). In “Position Yourself,” Moreillon encourages school librarians to coteach reading comprehension strategies with the classroom teachers to help them improve student achievement in reading (28).

Greater preparation is needed for school librarians to teach reading comprehension strategies. As the role of the school librarian evolves to take on new responsibilities, it is important that appropriate preparation is provided for successful
teaching of reading comprehension strategies. Concerns regarding insufficient preparation are expressed by teachers in university library schools as well as library practitioners.

Zimmerman says teachers are often not prepared by their training to sufficiently engage in the reading comprehension instruction that children need (47). Loertscher (46) agrees that library schools do not prepare librarians to be reading teachers of children's library materials. He refers to Sharon Grimes, author of *Reading is Our Business: How Libraries Can Foster Reading Comprehension*, in which she explains how to teach reading comprehension through literature in the elementary school grades. Grimes asks library program faculty in universities to consider preparing their students to teach reading (qtd. in Loertscher 46). Zimmerman challenges school librarians to develop their knowledge base in the teaching of reading comprehension (48). She refers them to the reference section of her article for resources that would help them in this endeavor (48).

Marilyn Z. Joyce acknowledges that it is the role of Language Arts teachers to teach students to understand the meaning of works of fiction. Since the school librarian is the information specialist, Joyce suggests the school librarian is the logical person to teach students how to read and find meaning in informational texts. She stresses the importance of consistency and reinforcement as reading comprehension is taught by all teachers across the disciplines (36).
Strategies for Reading Comprehension Instruction

Strategies for the school librarian teaching reading comprehension instruction are presented in the literature. In “Position Yourself,” Moreillon says classroom teachers and school librarians in a teaching role do not have a common understanding or experience of terminology used in information literacy standards or the vocabulary used in teaching reading comprehension strategies (28). She recommends the practices of team teaching and coteaching between classroom teachers and the librarian to strengthen the teaching of reading comprehension strategies (29). Identifying specific reading comprehension strategies is an important first step toward improved teaching of these critical skills.

The following strategies include most reading comprehension strategies found in the literature: Background knowledge refers to what students already know. Research literature supports the fact that what students already know will strongly affect how well they will learn new information (Zimmerman 50). Building, activating, recalling, and assessing background or prior knowledge is an important reading comprehension strategy (Coatney 60; McKenzie 14; Moreillon, “Position Yourself” 28; Trinkle, “Reading for Meaning” 48; Zimmerman 50)

Linking the known to the unknown, a skill closely related to background knowledge, is shown in the research to be one of the most effective comprehension skills (Keene qtd. in Zimmerman 48; Zimmerman 50). The American Association of School Librarians, in their position statement regarding the school librarian’s role in reading (1), says people will use information in their lives according to their ability to
understand what they read and integrate their new learning with what they already know (1). They believe it is the job of the school librarian to collaboratively teach reading comprehension strategies, which include assessing and using background knowledge (1). Zimmerman considers increasing the student’s background knowledge to be part of the school librarian’s role. For this purpose, she recommends the librarian make use of her knowledge of library resources, the literature, and the curriculum to engage in such academically enriching literary experiences as reading aloud to students from different genres using informational and poetry books, one-on-one reading with a mentor-partner, literature discussion groups, allowing repeated cognitive exposure to information, and processing several times in different ways (50).

Modeling reading comprehension strategies and behaviors and sharing the joy of reading with students are emphasized by Zimmerman (49). She recommends doing this by reading aloud, talking about books, and modeling strategies for successful reading. Ellen Oliver Keene (qtd. in Zimmerman 48) recommends explicit teaching and modeling how to make text-to-self connections (students making connections between the text they are reading and their background knowledge and own life experiences), text-to-world connections (making connections between the text they are reading and what is happening in the world), and text-to-text connections (making connections between what they are reading and another text) (Grimes 20; Sweet and Snow qtd. in Zimmerman 48; Trinkle, “Reading for Meaning” 48). Modeling use of comprehension strategies is a strong way to help students learn how to think about reading. Modeling joyful reading helps students learn about their own delight in reading and to gradually
assume responsibility for their own book selection, reading, and comprehension behaviors (Zimmerman 48).

Questioning is another reading comprehension strategy helpful to the reader (Grimes 43; Trinkle, “Reading for Meaning” 48). McKenzie proposes students use questions to acquire meaning when it eludes them (14). The research and writings of Anne Polselli Sweet and Catherine E. Snow, *Rethinking Reading Comprehension*, refer to the strategy of self-questioning (qtd. in Zimmerman 48). The American Association of School Librarians in “Position Statement on the School Librarian’s Role,” speaks of posing questions related to the reading assignment (1). In “Position Yourself,” Moreillon refers to questioning and aligns it with the information literacy skills of posing important questions and developing and refining questions (28). Zimmerman speaks of delving deeper with questions (48).

Making inferences is a reading comprehension strategy identified by a number of authors. Inferring is defined by Grimes as the power to guess the unseen from the seen (90); by M. Singer in 1988 as the ability to make connections, perceive possible relationships, and see links between textual units like sentences, paragraphs, and chapters or sections (qtd. in Grimes 90); and by McKenzie as students picking up clues and arriving at possible interpretations (14). Singer says that inferring is the cornerstone of language processing (qtd. in Grimes 90). Other authors also identify making inferences as a reading comprehension strategy (Keene qtd. in Zimmerman 48; American Association of School Librarians “Position Statement” 1; Moreillon, “Reading and the Library Program” 28). Making predictions is identified as a reading
comprehension strategy (American Association of School Librarians, “Position Statement,” 31; Grimes 95; Moreillon, “Position Yourself” 28; Sweet and Snow qtd. in Zimmerman 48). Grimes defines predicting as using what happened now or in the past to foretell what will happen next (95).

Monitoring students for understanding is identified as a reading comprehension strategy (Moreillon, “Position Yourself” 28; Sweet and Snow qtd. in Zimmerman 48). Monitoring student reading comprehension and strategies is identified by the American Association of School Librarians in their “Position Statement” (1) as important reading comprehension strategies. Joyce (36) and Trinkle, in “Reading for Meaning” (48), refer to self-monitoring. Joyce says monitoring comprehension tracks student understanding of what they are reading. When students track their own understanding as they read, they know what they understand and do not understand. When they are confused by what they are reading, they can apply fix-up options or strategies (Joyce 36; Moreillon, “Position Yourself” 28) such as consulting a dictionary for an unfamiliar word or trying to put a difficult passage into their own words.

Determining importance is identified by Grimes as the ability to distinguish between main ideas or themes and supporting details (73). In “Position Yourself,” Moreillon aligned determining main ideas with locating relevant information and clarifying main and supporting ideas (28). The American Association of School Librarians (“Position Statement” 31) identified determining main ideas as an important reading comprehension strategy.
Using sensory images, visualizing and picturing are identified as important reading comprehension strategies (Grimes 32-33; Keene qtd. in Zimmerman 48; McKenzie 15; Moreillon, “Position Yourself” 28; Sweet and Snow qtd. in Zimmerman 48). Grimes notes that proficient readers create their own mental images as they read. When children are encouraged to draw pictures about what they read, their sketches show their comprehension and engagement with the text (32).

Analyzing and synthesizing are important reading comprehension strategies (Grimes 102; Moreillon, “Position Yourself” 28; Trinkle, “Reading for Meaning 48; Zimmerman 28). Analysis means separating something into its component parts; synthesis means integrating two or more existing elements into something new. These two important skills work together to build new knowledge (102). McKenzie describes synthesis as combining fragments and ideas in new ways to create import and novelty (15).

Creating a nurturing reading culture (Zimmerman 48-51) is a unique reading comprehension strategy, beyond the direct instruction of students, that contributes significantly to enabling students to be proficient readers and learners. This strategy involves access, interest, and motivation. Zimmerman explains that thoughtful design of the library and careful organization of reading materials that are of interest to students make reading material more accessible to students. Rotating classroom collections and not allowing the same books to linger for lengthy periods of time in the classroom will also contribute to more fruitful access. Eliminating practices such as rigid scheduling of classes and restrictive checkout policies and other barriers will improve student access.
To increase student interest in reading, Zimmerman recommends providing materials in a variety of formats, including comic books, paperbacks, video or audiotapes, and magazines. These formats often stimulate reading and have as much value as traditional textbooks. To increase student motivation to read, Zimmerman suggests an abundance of diverse materials in a warm, friendly, productive, user-oriented learning climate. She also recommends reading discussion circles that promote student social interaction with each other. Recommended lists of quality books and materials on a given topic can be helpful in motivating reading. Student motivation can also be increased by allowing students to field test books and return materials that do not meet their interests or needs.

Zimmerman refers to findings in the 1999 National Assessment of Educational Progress that students do less well with informational reading than with narratives (50). She notes that informational text is what composes most reading required of adults. The 2002 work of Cathy Collins Block and Michael Pressley finds that teachers lack strategies for helping students comprehend informational text (qtd. in Zimmerman 48). Block and Pressley say that students who learn to use paragraph and section headings, tables of content, indices, captions, basic expository structures, such as compare and contrast, sequence of events, and description, are more able to comprehend and retain ideas (qtd. in Zimmerman 51).

Among the many resources for the school librarian to learn about teaching reading comprehension strategies is Sharon Grimes’ book, *Reading is Our Business: How Libraries Can Foster Reading Comprehension*. Each comprehension strategy is
discussed and described in detail. Included for each strategy are actual classroom examples, sample worksheets, computer activities, age-appropriate authors and book lists, and other teaching tools to support strategy instruction. A section in each chapter describes how teachers can model the particular strategy being taught (Grimes).

Reading Comprehension in the Primary Grades

In her article on the changing role of the librarian in the elementary schools, Buzzeo refers to basic literacy driving primary education (18) and a new focus on literacy in the primary grade classrooms (19). Hogan (2) says readers in the early grades depend heavily on their emerging decoding skills. She says in grades three and four readers have a need to depend more on their language skills as they shift from learning to read to reading to learn. This may explain why comprehension regresses in grade three. Hogan notes that besides decoding, children’s lack of language abilities contributes to a problem in listening comprehension which in turn can account for their reading difficulties (2). Hogan refers to the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar as essential in the process of reading comprehension, allowing understanding of words and individual sentences. Vocabulary and grammar are foundational for developing higher language skills. There is empirical evidence that children in the primary grades, and even pre-kindergarten, are quite capable of learning the higher level language skills of inferencing, comprehension monitoring, and text structure knowledge. However, these skills are not often promoted by reading teachers (3).

School librarians have limited time with primary grade students. Walker believes this time can be maximized by the librarian modeling and reinforcing research-based
reading strategies used in the classroom (1). Walker’s book, *Teaching Reading Strategies in the School Library*, provides detailed visual examples with book titles and summaries that work with reading strategies. Each of ten reading strategies is addressed in a separate chapter; one section is devoted to reading comprehension strategies (11-134). Hudak recommends this book as a valuable resource for lower elementary librarians (12).

Toni Buzzeo (18) considers it good news that the entire nation is buzzing with talk of early literacy and refers to the tight focus on literacy in the primary grade classrooms as something new. Recent research on reading development in preschool and early elementary students has provided significant insights about how reading comprehension skills develop at an early age (van den Broek et al. 259). Children who have trouble reading and understanding information have difficult school experiences and can be severely affected throughout their lives.

Paul van den Broek et al. state that children must be able to create a coherent mental representation in order to understand what they read or hear (259). Van den Broek cites recent research that says the ability to do so starts to develop before reading age when children are able to read the printed word and those early individual differences are predictive of reading comprehension performance in activities (259). Van den Broek conducted a study using third graders in one group and two- and three-year-olds in a second group. Casual questioning techniques were used as the children listened to narratives appropriate for their age. Their comprehension was tested using
questions and recall tasks. Results showed it is possible to design and implement interventions that encourage the development of reading comprehensions skills in third graders and also in the two- to three-year-olds (264). The study found that well before they are able to read the printed word, children engage in inferential processes, identify meaningful relations, and establish coherence (259). Van den Broek recommends interventions with third graders or even toddlers. It was shown that, for third graders and even children two or three years old, developing interventions using non-reading contexts holds promise for enhancing children’s inferential and comprehension skills (265). Understanding how comprehension develops is instrumental in developing these processes in young children.

Recent research supports the importance of background knowledge to beginning literacy and reading comprehension for students of all ages (Coatney 60). Coatney says there is no better place for children to learn background knowledge than the school library. As the librarian, she says she has access to all the background knowledge students need and knows how to find it, repackage it, and make it interesting for them (60).

The research about the importance of background knowledge directs the reading comprehension instruction choices of Karen Capraro (14). Capraro is a second grade classroom teacher and associate professor and practicum instructor in Rhode Island College early childhood teacher education program. Capraro relates her experience in using metacognition to help her students become more aware of their own thinking and their reading comprehension skills. The children are taught that schema is something
they already know (14). They use their schema to activate prior knowledge. In preparing to read a story, the second graders use the pages in their reading journals, dividing their pages into three parts: their schema, the questions they have, and their new learning. They prepare this column before they begin to read. As questions pop into their heads while reading, they jot them into the second column. They record new things they learn in the third column. Capraro finds that this process helps the children gain a deeper understanding of what they read and honors and encourages the thinking of the children (16).

Sipe (376) did a naturalistic study of the literary competence of a class of twenty-seven first and second graders. Responses given during read-alouds of picture books were recorded. Sipe was able to conclude that storybook read-alouds are an important strategy for the development of literary understanding in young children. He noted that most of the children’s occasions to talk about the story were during the read-aloud time, and that it may be beneficial to allow students to talk during the reading process (378). It may be unreasonable to expect children of this age to hold their responses until the end of the story. It may cause them to lose the response (378). Allowing students to talk during the reading process presents an opportunity to scaffold the children’s construction of meaning as they are in the process of constructing the meaning. Sipe also suggests that illustrations, end pages, title pages, and other features of a book offer rich potential for making meaning (378).

Braxton (53), a school librarian, has found one of the most successful tools in promoting reading comprehension skills in kindergarten is a Big Book, propped on an
easel, specifically written to foster and consolidate early reading skills. Children can see the text, join in the reading, and see how reading is done. Describing the activities that develop reading comprehension skills, she finds this reading activity can connect what the students already know to what they read together and find their own meaning; it can teach book language and vocabulary such as title, author, illustrator, characters, setting and storyline; it can demonstrate strategies such as rereading or reading on to make and maintain meaning; it can consolidate students’ basic sight vocabulary of high-frequency words; and it can allow children to participate at their own levels of understanding, yet provide them with a pathway forward (58).

Eleanor B. Howe cites research showing that reading aloud to children correlates positively with their later school success and is the single most important activity in building the knowledge required for reading success (57). Literacy research also documents the benefits of reading aloud on reading comprehension (57). She describes a classroom action research project that was designed to see if instruction in three listening comprehension skills improved reading comprehension when using the same skills (61). The listening skills were sequencing, literal recall, and identifying the main idea (62). Reading comprehension skills were used in teaching the listening comprehension skills, were effective in the listening mode, and were then transferred and used as reading comprehension skills (67). The study found that listening comprehension skills may transfer to reading skills. Indirect teaching methods based on theory and research in listening and reading comprehension were recommended to enhance listening comprehension during story hour (67-69).
In “Listening Comprehension Leads to Reading Success,” Trinkle says reading aloud to children helps them understand how words work. They can hear that words are made of smaller parts called phonemes (43). The National Institute of Child Health and Development says that children will ultimately learn to make connections when they repeatedly hear sounds in many different words (43). There is a huge reading advantage difference between lower income children who hear far fewer words spoken in their homes than do children of professional families who hear a wider range of vocabulary (43). Trinkle says it is important to close this vocabulary gap in the early primary grades. She says school librarians can help by selecting books that immerse children in high interest and higher level vocabulary to read aloud to them (44). By hearing higher level vocabulary in the context of a story, the children are more likely to remember those words and connect them to themselves and their world. The connections made are powerful in improving reading comprehension. Trinkle recommends the librarian read aloud to children and have conversation with them about the books they hear every time they come to the library (44).

Fredericks (42) recommends Readers Theatre in the library as well as the classroom. In Readers Theatre, students read from a written script based on a particular piece of literature. Scripts may be written by teachers, by individual students, or by collaborative groups. Students personally interpret scripts in a dramatic style and creatively interact with others. This allows children many different interpretations of the same piece of literature. Students integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening in their preparation and performance of scripts. Stating that the central goal of reading
instruction is comprehension, Fredericks says the major facets of Readers Theater are the rich opportunities to become active comprehenders (sic) and to give meaning to print in a supported and engaged learning environment (43). He says reading fluency is the ability to read smoothly, easily, and readily without the worry of word recognition problems. Fluency is directly related to reading comprehension. When students are able to decode words with accuracy and ease, they can concentrate on comprehension, the ultimate goal of reading. A lack of fluency is often associated with poor comprehension. Fredricks cites researchers who say fluency is the missing ingredient in reading programs (43). The National Reading Panel has said that fluency is a key component in literacy instruction (qtd. in Fredricks 43). Fredericks says a fluent reader has had multiple experiences with text and multiple opportunities to share text in an expressive manner (43). Thus Fredricks thinks of the opportunities for sharing text in an expressive manner in ReadersTheater as fluency in action.

Conclusions

The literacy skills and reading habits of students continue to be a major concern across our nation. It is difficult to think of someone who will not be affected if the decline in reading continues. College and university teachers have major concerns with the reading abilities of those students who come unprepared to read complex text. Much effort is given to research and development of reading programs. At this time there is a focus on reading comprehension instruction. For many, the school librarian is positioned to be the literacy leader for the school’s reading program. A school librarian who could effectively teach reading comprehension to students in the library, as well as teaching
classroom teachers reading comprehension strategies, would be of great value to her school community.

More research is needed on how best to address the teaching of reading for improved comprehension, especially in the primary grades. Library schools in the universities can prepare the future school librarian to be a capable teacher of reading comprehension. The school librarian in the field will need to take responsibility for maximizing her ability to be the leader in the school’s reading program and a teacher of reading comprehension. Schools can cooperate and assume responsibility to assist the librarian in assuming leadership to improve reading programs and student abilities and enjoyment of reading. Elementary school administrators can benefit their students by thinking and learning about this expanding role of school librarians.
The elementary school librarian has long been considered a key player in the school reading program. Over the years the librarian’s role has seen gradual change to where the current position includes teacher of reading comprehension in many elementary school libraries. To explore the current status of the elementary school librarian’s role, these three questions are asked: What factors exist today that are influencing the development of the elementary school librarian role? What is the role of the elementary school librarian at this time regarding the school reading program and the teaching of reading? How does the librarian approach the teaching of reading comprehension in the library?

Factors Influencing Development of Elementary School Librarian Role

A foundational factor driving change in the role of the school librarian has been and is currently the perception that students’ ability to read and understand the printed word is developing at a level lower than that required for our democracy to survive, for satisfying lives to be achieved, and for students becoming contributing citizens. In recent decades this perception has been supported by students’ low reading scores on standardized tests; studies that show apathetic adult reading habits; less participation in civic and cultural matters, such as literature and art appreciation, volunteerism, philanthropy, and political engagement; and lax student participation in high school and college classes as electronic media preoccupies students’ lives. As the reading
concern is addressed, state standards are raised, laws such as No Child Left Behind are passed, literacy standards are rewritten and upgraded, and library organizations author new standards for the preparation of school librarians, up-to-date professional responsibilities for school librarians, and crosswalks for standards across the curriculum. The explicit teaching of reading comprehension skills is identified as a promising strategy for increasing students’ reading abilities.

Research studies show that a strong library program with a strong school librarian can increase student reading scores significantly. Studies also show the importance of teachers working closely with the school librarian on curriculum planning and implementation to improve student achievement. Some library school professors believe that school librarians are perfectly positioned to be teachers of reading comprehension (Moreillon qtd. in Hudak 12). The overlap between teacher standards and the standards for librarians supports the suggestion that the responsibility for teaching reading comprehension skills should be shared (Moreillon, “Position Yourself” 28). Moreillon calls for the school librarian and the classroom teacher to team teach reading comprehension skills (32). Some librarians and other educators recommend the school librarian become the most capable teacher of reading comprehension skills in the school and that they teach these skills to other teachers in the school (McKenzie 14). Buzzeo says that literacy is a perfect arena for the librarian’s skill set (19). Grimes recommends that the program faculty in university library schools begin to prepare candidates to be teachers of reading comprehension skills (qtd. in Loertscher 46).
It seems there is clear support for change in the role of the school librarian to include teacher of reading comprehension skills. However, many library professionals do not agree on the wisdom of such a development in their role. Some believe they should be strong supporters, even leaders, in the school reading program, but they stop short of including reading teacher in that role. Clarity and significant agreement must first exist among school librarian leaders in the profession, program faculty in university library schools, school library associations, and others before the librarian’s role will experience solid change in the direction of reading comprehension teacher. Yet, such a role is emerging and the librarian’s role is clearly changing.

Current Role of the Elementary School Librarian in Reading Program

The role of the school librarian extends today into many areas, but each librarian’s role will differ according to the specific needs and focus of their school and the choices made there by administrators, faculty, and the librarian about how the librarian can best contribute to the school’s mission. In most elementary schools the librarian role is in various stages of being or becoming central to the school’s reading program.

School librarians think of their role in a variety of ways, from making books available to students and teachers to making themselves and their library media center the heart of the reading program. A number of publications have been helpful in describing the role of the librarian, including Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning, authored by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the
Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AAECT), and published by the American Library Association (ALA) in 1998. The AASL Board defined professional responsibilities for the 21st century school librarian in a 2009 position statement. Most recently AASL and ALA authored and published Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians.

The school librarian’s role has expanded extensively with new expectations from many directions. Few tasks, if any, have been discontinued. Career librarians, library associations, and university library school professors have identified many aspects of the librarian role. These general areas include building a quality collection of reading materials for the library and classroom that support curricular content areas and the personal reading habits of students, promoting the lifetime love of reading, creating a reading culture, creating and leading a literacy center with a joyful reading environment and a wealth of books, collaborating and partnering with classroom teachers and specialists; designing teaching units for reading; supporting the school reading program and teaching literacy skills, aligning learning objectives and integrating literacy standards, and educating others about the expanding role of school librarians as teachers and instructional partners.

**Teaching Reading Comprehension in the School Library**

Reading comprehension skills can be separated into decoding skills and making meaning of the printed word. Studies have shown that the teaching of reading comprehension skills has been seriously neglected in the classroom. There are strong recommendations for the explicit teaching of reading comprehension skills by teachers.
of all subjects at all grade levels. Research suggests that these reading skills can be successfully taught in primary grades and as early as two years old (van den Broek).

Many reading comprehension skills are identified in the AASL *Standards for the 21st Century Learner*. Trinkle says teachers find the 21st Century Standards use vocabulary that is familiar to them. Examples include building prior knowledge; questioning; analysis; synthesis; evaluation; information organization; self-monitoring; genres; and fluent reading to make connections with self, the world, and previous reading (Trinkle, “Reading for Meaning” 48). In a review of the literature, a number of specific reading comprehension skills and teaching strategies are identified and recommended for use in improving reading skills and student achievement. Current and aspiring librarians have reason to be excited and challenged to increase the value of and respect for their role by supporting, promoting, teaching, and leading in the school reading program. They may want to consider becoming the most capable teacher of reading comprehension skills in the school and transferring that skill and practice to all colleagues, dramatically enhancing the strength of the school and the library program.

Sharon Grimes’ book, *Reading is Our Business: How Libraries Can Foster Reading Comprehension* is recommended for school librarians who are motivated to learn about or improve their abilities in teaching reading comprehension skills. Each comprehension strategy is discussed and described in detail, providing examples, activities, authors, book lists, and other teaching tools to support the instruction of each strategy (Grimes).
WORKS CITED


