

**Flexible Scheduling and School Library Programs:
An Annotated Bibliography**

Megan McCrery
Drexel University
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Dr. Alison M. Lewis
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Introduction and Scope

The following bibliography addresses the subject of flexible scheduling and its impact on school library programs, focusing on the elementary school level. Flexible scheduling is formally defined as "a scheduling arrangement that provides open access to the library media center throughout the day rather than only during a specific 'library time'" (McGregor, 2006, p. 1). For at least two decades, "the best practice method of achieving open access to the school library media center has been through flexible scheduling" (Gavigan, Pribesh, & Dickinson, 2010, p. 131).

The research presented in this bibliography considers flexible scheduling in the context of preparation and delivery of school library programs, librarian and teacher collaboration, instituting policies of open access, and administrative perspectives. The articles were published between 1993 and 2010 and represent original research performed in Canada and the United States. Due to the limited body of empirical research on flexible scheduling, significant advocacy for flexible access has developed via the professional community. Therefore, this bibliography also includes opinion narratives published in practitioner literature, as well as position statements from professional organizations, in an effort to present the fullest examination of the topic.

Description

Elementary children, who are approximately five to twelve years of age, have evolving information needs. Elementary-aged children are at the outset of their formal education, and tend to rely on visual and auditory cues instead of exclusively textual

information (Cooper, 2002). Moreover, children in grades three and lower may be "nonreaders, emergent readers, or beginning readers" (Cooper, 2002, p. 904). They are active problem solvers with "a natural tendency to explore" (Borgman, Hirsh, Walter, & Gallagher, 1995, p. 665). Additionally, "today's generation of children were born into a world of digital technology and the Internet," noted Spink, Danby, Mallan, and Butler (2010, p. 191) and are often referred to as "digital natives" (p. 191). These factors, along with a growing body of educational research, combine to suggest "that learning is most effective at the point of need" (McGregor, 2002, p. 73).

Characteristics of flexibly scheduled library programming typically include: meaningful access when needed; curriculum integration; teacher and librarian collaboration; flexibility and adaptability; and the availability of a library media specialist as a valuable resource (McGregor, 2002). "Flexible scheduling in school libraries provides an effective vehicle for achieving the learning goals and objectives of both the school library program and the curriculum by providing resources and learning opportunities when they are needed and relevant" (McGregor, 2002, p. 73). Simply stated, flexible scheduling encourages active, student-centered learning. Library programs that are fully integrated into curriculum strengthen the teaching and education process, and ensure that students have the ability to be active learners who participate in guiding their own learning process (AASL, 2014).

Still, it is important to note that there is some controversy surrounding the subject of flexible scheduling. Many school library media professionals are sharply divided over the benefits of flexible versus fixed library scheduling, and not all of the

literature addressing the topic favors flexible scheduling. Among the chorus of voices insisting that flexible scheduling allows for "effective use of 'the teachable moment'" (McGregor, 2002, p. 72), there are also those who assert, "you can't teach kids you don't see" (Johnson, 2001, p. 39). With fixed scheduling, students visit the library media center on a formally scheduled basis, ensuring that every class has regular access and instruction (Van Deusen & Tallman, 1994).

Ultimately, the research suggests compelling benefits in transitioning from fixed scheduling to mixed or fully flexible scheduling. Flexible scheduling provides students with more meaningful learning opportunities, and an environment of open access encourages collaboration and the full integration of library instruction with curriculum. "Without flexible access library programs in place, it will be impossible for elementary schools to realize the potential of a fully integrated library media program" (Shannon, 1996, p. 163).

Bibliography

American Association of School Librarians (2014). *Position statement on flexible scheduling*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/resources/statements/flex-sched>

Annotation: This position paper, most recently revised in 2014, serves as a core reference for many of the scholarly and practitioner articles on the subject of flexible scheduling and school library programs. The AASL, via this position statement, emphasizes the need for a fully integrated library program in reaching the ideal of active learning, and the importance of an open schedule based on flexible access to reach that goal. The position is based on the idea that students, teachers, and school librarians are collaborative partners in learning and asserts that classes must be flexibly scheduled, on an as-needed basis, to fully support "just-in-time research, training, and utilization of technology." The AASL further contends that the entire school community--Board of Education, District Administration, Principal, School Library Media Specialist, and Teachers--must share the responsibility for flexibly scheduled library programs. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) is a national professional membership organization focused on school librarians and the school library community.

Gavigan, K., Pribesh, S., & Dickinson, G. (2010). Fixed or flexible schedule? Schedule impacts and school library circulation. *Library & Information Science Research*, 32(2), 131-137.

Annotation: In examining the relationship between flexible scheduling and circulation in the school library media center, this study is the first to offer scientific evidence that

flexible scheduling increases circulation. It is important to note, as the authors of this study do, that several factors may influence elementary school library circulation: collection quality, the presence of classroom collections, and reading incentive programs. Hence, the study utilizes a non-experimental design, and is exploratory in nature. Still, this article is noteworthy because the majority of empirical research investigates flexible scheduling in the context of collaboration or implementation. The authors offer conclusive evidence that a library program built around a flexible schedule is likely to demonstrate a corresponding rise in book circulation. Specifically, libraries using fully flexed schedules circulated an average of 102 books per year (on a per-pupil basis) as opposed to 56.7 books per year for libraries with fixed schedules. The research will be of particular interest to those affiliated with elementary school library media centers as the authors conducted their study exclusively in an elementary school environment. The research is also notable for its robust study population of 176 library media specialists, and the equal participation of both suburban and rural elementary schools. Dr. Gavigan is an Associate Professor of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina's College of Mass Communications and Information Studies; Dr. Pribesh is an Associate Professor of Research Methods and Statistics in the Educational Foundations and Leadership department at Old Dominion University; and Dr. Dickinson is the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies & Research for the Darden College of Education at Old Dominion University.

Haycock, K. (1998). The impact of scheduling on cooperative program planning and teaching (CPPT) and information skills instruction. *School Libraries in Canada*, 18(3), 20-23.

Annotation: This research, using a sample of 100 elementary schools in Canada, replicates the United States studies conducted by Van Deusen and Tallman (1994) and corroborates the findings that flexible scheduling facilitates teacher-librarian and classroom teacher collaboration. [Note: The Canadian term "teacher-librarian" is interchangeable with the United States term "school library media specialist."]

Haycock's research found that in fully flexed schools, media specialists spent more than 30 minutes collaborating with teachers on lessons, as opposed to 0-5 minutes of collaboration when a fixed schedule was in place. The study also found that combining flexible scheduling with proactive administrative expectations resulted in the greatest amount of collaborative planning and teaching: librarians in flexed schools developed significantly more units than counterparts in fixed schools, by a ratio of 4:1. Dr.

Haycock is Professor and Director of the University of British Columbia School of Library, Archival and Information Studies. Dr. Haycock's research on this subject was presented at the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) Third International Forum on School Librarianship, 1999.

Johnson, D. (2001). It's good to be inflexible: Are flexible library schedules better than fixed ones? *School Library Journal*, 47(11), 39.

Annotation: This brief opinion piece argues that there are serious drawbacks to flexible scheduling while highlighting the strengths of fixed scheduling. The article makes valid points in that "you can't teach kids you don't see" and that certain types of

prescribed curriculum may benefit from a fixed schedule. However, the article also poses questions that seem contrary to a thoughtful examination of the topic, such as: "Do we want to work with a fixed schedule and have job security or with a flex schedule and be vulnerable to cuts?" An acerbic tone and implausible assertions--for example, that the AASL believes "fixed schedules are bad"--further serve to undermine what could have been a productive inquiry. Still, the piece is notable for its high-profile critique of flexible scheduling, and for generating a firestorm of controversy subsequent to its publication. Mr. Johnson wrote *The Indispensable Librarian* (Linworth, 1997), serves as the Director of Media and Technology for the Mankato (MN) Public Schools, and is an adjunct faculty member of the Minnesota State University in Mankato.

McGregor, J. (2002). Flexible scheduling: How does a principal facilitate implementation? *School Libraries Worldwide*, 8(1), 71-84.

Annotation: This qualitative inquiry explores the implementation of flexible scheduling in the absence of a formal mandate or funding incentives. Specifically, the research examines the role and mindset of the school principal in these transitions. Principals perceive the advantages of flexible scheduling to include: increased opportunities for librarian-teacher collaboration and by extension better support for curriculum; better and more exciting learning opportunities for students; and the transition of the school library to a learner-centered "hub of learning." Principals perceive the primary drawback of flexible scheduling to be logistics, in particular the ability to accommodate all who want or need access to the library or librarian. Further, the study demonstrates three consistent findings for all participants: the importance of

principal advocacy; the willingness of principals to be risk-takers; and the principals' primary focus on benefits to students. McGregor's research uses a limited study population of just six elementary schools, and given the small sample size few generalizations can be drawn. Still, this research provides a useful collection of qualitative information. Dr. McGregor is the Coordinator of the Teacher Librarianship Master of Education, School of Information Studies, Charles Stuart University, Australia. She is the 1998 recipient of the Murofushi Research Award, adjudicated by the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL).

McGregor, J. (2006). Flexible scheduling: Implementing an innovation. *School Library Media Research*, 9, 1-27.

Annotation: This study builds on the initial results of McGregor's 2002 research, on administrative perceptions surrounding flexible scheduling, to include perspectives from teachers and library media specialists. Using a semistructured interview method, the study examines six schools throughout the United States that exhibited a variety of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The study finds that in all cases, the move to flexible scheduling was driven by a particular educational need and that both a proactive school library media specialist and principal support were critical to the success of the transition. Tangentially, the research also demonstrates a very positive view of flexible scheduling, coupled with the clear belief that learning and the library become more relevant to students. Despite the small sample size, this study is notable in that it proves successful implementation of flexible scheduling can follow many paths, and that the optimal approach should be dependent upon situational needs. Dr.

McGregor is the Coordinator of the Teacher Librarianship Master of Education, School of Information Studies, Charles Stuart University, Australia. She is the 1998 recipient of the Murofushi Research Award, adjudicated by the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL).

Shannon, D. (1996). Tracking the transition to a flexible access library program in two Library Power elementary schools. *School Library Media Quarterly*, 23(3), 155-163.

Annotation: This article examines the process of implementing flexibly scheduled library programs in an elementary school setting, and follows the evolution of these programs over time. The research is notable because it is one of the first to consider how a flexible access program evolves based on the collective efforts, perceptions, and expectations of various stakeholders. The study confirms that the most serious impediment to flexible access is teacher planning time. Shannon concludes that meeting the challenges of implementing flexibly scheduled library programs requires communication, administrative support, professional development opportunities, adequate collections of resources, and a school climate that encourages cooperation and collaboration. A potential drawback to the research is the extremely small sample size of just two schools, both of which were participants in the Library Power program. [Note: Library Power was a 1998 initiative supported by the Wallace Foundation, seeking to enhance and elevate the role of libraries in public schools.] Despite the inability to generalize findings from this study, the research nonetheless offers compelling insight into flexibly scheduled library programming. Dr. Shannon is an

Associate Professor at the University of South Carolina School of Library and Information Science. She has served on the American Association of School Librarians Board of Directors, the AASL Research and Statistics Committee, AASL's Knowledge Quest editorial board, and the American Library Association Committee on Accreditation.

Van Deusen, J.D. (1993). The effects of fixed versus flexible scheduling on curriculum involvement and skills integration in elementary school library media programs. *School Library Media Quarterly*, 21(3), 173-82.

Annotation: This qualitative study seeks to establish the effects of both fixed and flexible scheduling on the curriculum involvement of library media specialists, and on the integration of library skills into curriculum. A total of 61 elementary school participants provided data on tasks including: gathering resources for instruction; designing instructional objectives; collaboration; the delivery of instruction; and the evaluation of learning units. [Note: tasks were synthesized from David Loertscher's *Taxonomies of the School Library Program*.] The research finds that flexible scheduling alone contributes to greater involvement in the evaluation of learning units. More importantly, however, the research finds that a flexible schedule *in which team planning occurs* leads to greater library media specialist involvement for all curriculum tasks. The study was an important precursor for several future research projects by van Deusen regarding flexible scheduling, and is notable for its frequent citation in the canon of flexible scheduling research studies. Dr. Donham Van Deusen is a Professor Emeritus of the School Library Studies at the University of Northern Iowa and a past Board

Member of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL).

Van Deusen, J. D. (1996). An analysis of the time use of elementary school library media specialists and factors that influence it. *School Library Media Quarterly*, 24(2), 85-92.

Annotation: This study investigates the use of time in the elementary school library for a sample population of 90 Iowa library media specialists. While the investigation of flexible scheduling was not the primary motivation for this research, the study nonetheless finds some compelling evidence in support of fully flexible or mixed scheduling. The research found significantly higher instances of individual assistance to students, provision of electronic or technological support, and consultative work with teachers. Findings also demonstrate that the incorporation of flexible scheduling does not diminish the amount of teaching performed by library media specialists, offering a valid empirical counterpoint to the "you can't teach kids you don't see" argument. Additionally, the research discovered that flexible scheduling corresponds with a rise in managerial tasks performed by library media specialists, suggesting that the complexity of flexibly scheduled programs may demand more management than traditional programs. Dr. Donham Van Deusen is a Professor Emeritus of the School Library Studies at the University of Northern Iowa and a past Board Member of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL).

Van Deusen, J. D., & Tallman, J. I. (1994). The impact of scheduling on curriculum consultation and information skills instruction. Part one: The 1993-94 AASL/Highsmith Research Award study. *School Library Media Quarterly*, 23(1), 17-25.

Annotation: This initial phase of a three-part study focuses on the scheduling patterns utilized in elementary school library media programs. More specifically, the research examines the relationships between fixed, flexible or mixed scheduling for library media centers and the corresponding consultation and information skills instruction performed by librarians. Using a robust sample population of 397 elementary library media specialists, the research finds that occurrences of curriculum consultation were significantly greater in schools that utilize flexible or mixed schedules than in those with fixed schedules. Further, the research determined that library media specialists using hybrid (partially flexed) schedules taught significantly more lessons on information skills than those with either fixed or flexible schedules. Notably, the study offers insight into both fixed and flexible scheduling thanks to a balanced consideration of each. This research is important not only for its primary conclusions, but also in suggesting that mixed scheduling may represent the best compromise in instances where fully flexed scheduling is unachievable (i.e. schools that face contractual constraints, or in which administrators and teachers are adamant about children visiting the library regularly). Dr. Donham Van Deusen is a Professor Emeritus of the School Library Studies at the University of Northern Iowa and a past Board Member of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). Dr. Tallman is an Assistant Professor at the School of Library and Information Science at the University of Iowa.

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