

"I Choose...to Give My All to My Students and Colleagues"

Karen Nourse Reed | karen.reed@mtsu.edu

Being an effective school librarian involves more than keeping a well-stocked library or teaching students how to navigate information sources. Beyond these important duties, AASL's *National School Library Standards* reinforce the importance of positive workplace behaviors critical to professional success. The AASL Standards cite specific dispositions exhibited by skilled school librarians such as a willingness to collaborate, an enthusiasm for life-long growth through self-reflection and professional development, and a spirit of open-mindedness and tolerance (AASL 2018). When these dispositions are demonstrated on the job, they contribute to a positive school environment for everyone. However, unlike specific job tasks, these behaviors cannot be mandated by one's principal; positive traits such as collegiality and empathy must be given freely by the school librarian.

To better understand the relationship between professional deeds and behaviors exhibited by highly effective school librarians, I conducted a study of eight school librarians in my state (Reed and Tharp 2020). I hoped to better understand the range of voluntary extra-role behaviors they performed.

Background

Dennis Organ sought to understand why some employees chose to exhibit positive workplace behaviors beyond what was required by their employer (1988). His Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) theory categorized ten distinct and voluntary

extra-role behaviors such as courtesy, loyalty, and peacemaking. Organ's OCB theory realized the importance of these behaviors to a company's bottom line in improving employee efficiency.

Aaron Elkins applied the OCB theory to the work of school librarians and questioned the conditions associated with the demonstration of extra-role OCB behaviors (2015). He recognized that there were environmental factors that contributed to the school librarian's ability and/or willingness to display these actions with students and colleagues.

Anit Somech and Izhar Oplatka applied the OCB theory to teachers' work and delineated the voluntary behaviors into proactive deeds and kindnesses (2015). Their Teacher Citizenship Behavior (TCB) theory labeled the voluntary deeds as OCBs and the voluntary kindnesses as emotional citizenship behaviors (ECBs).

Although the TCB theory has been used to analyze the work of teachers and administrators, I wanted to apply it to the work of school librarians. For my study, I recruited eight school librarians who were prodigious volunteers outside of their paid jobs. Some participants volunteered with their state's professional school library organization, while others organized regional young adult literature conferences. I chose to speak with these individuals because I felt that outside volunteer work was an exemplar for the school library profession.

I interviewed each school librarian separately but used the same set of open-ended questions to get them to talk about their training, work, and professional mentors. I used a phenomenological methodology to try to understand the common experience of my participants in their own words, and I coded their statements using a framework developed from the components of the TCB theory.

Findings

Using the TCB theory's bifurcated classification of behaviors into OCBs (voluntary deeds) and ECBs (voluntary behaviors), I examined the demonstration of behaviors at three levels: the organization (school-wide and within volunteer work), the team (with colleagues on the job), and with students. I also found moderator factors that enhanced or suppressed an individual's ability to exhibit OCBs and ECBs on the job.

I found the following results in my study:

OCBs and ECBs were demonstrated in a range of ways. One participant described the importance of staying abreast of the latest in YA literature so her students would trust her book suggestions. Another described bringing unsolicited research articles to her busy assistant principal, a woman struggling to juggle the demands of work and home while pursuing her doctorate. Others described how they worked to cultivate a warm and welcoming school library.

Most participants could not separate their voluntary deeds (OCBs) from

their kind behaviors (ECBs). Participants were strongly motivated to go beyond the defined requirements of their jobs and work harder because they cared deeply for their students and colleagues.

Caring about their students and colleagues made participants want to engage more heavily in their profession. They wanted to learn more to better handle the questions that came their way. They looked for additional ways to get engaged with other school librarians, such as joining professional organizations and taking leadership roles in their schools and professional organizations. They reported such connections helped rejuvenate their passion for this work.

Participants with the highest number of exhibited OCBs and ECBs spoke repeatedly about the importance of positive relationships with students and colleagues. For example, one participant stated, "I feel this job is 100 percent about relationships, relationships with students and relationships with the teachers as well. You have to care about what they want and what they need. If you don't, you have no business being here because your job is to serve and support them."

Several barriers to teacher collaboration were cited. One school librarian reported that her new principal had changed her schedule to one less conducive to co-teaching; her classroom collaborations had plunged as a result. Another discussed the difficulties in securing teacher trust when teachers view the school librarian as a rookie.

Implications for Practice

Employees who care about the people they interact with on a daily basis contribute to a positive work environment, and school librarians are no exception. When school librarians choose to go beyond the defined tasks of their job, the

entire school benefits. Students who know they can count on their school librarian for great book recommendations and a friendly ear become frequent visitors to the school library. Teachers who know they are valued and supported by their school librarian will typically reciprocate. This environment is the structure needed for student success.

While state and professional standards dictate many job duties, it is often up to a principal to set exact parameters on the school librarian's instructional role (Church 2010, 2008). It is in the principal's best interest to cultivate a school environment in which school librarians are empowered to demonstrate OCBs and ECBs. If structural problems such as scheduling issues are preventing this fuller expression of the school librarian's instructional role, these problems should be brought to the attention of school administrators.



Karen Nourse Reed, PhD, is an associate professor at Middle Tennessee State University. She is a member of AASL

and was awarded the 2020 AASL Research Grant. She was the 2019 recipient of the L. Anne Clyde Memorial Research – Best Conference Paper Award. She authored the articles "An Interdisciplinary Approach in Service Learning and Community Partnerships through STEM in Higher Education" in the September 2020 issue of *Serve in DEED*, "Applying Gamification to the Library Orientation: A Study of Interactive User Experience and Engagement Preferences" in the September 2020 issue of *Information Technologies and Libraries*, and "Application of the Teacher Citizenship Behavior (TCB) Theory to the Extra-Role Work of the School Librarians" in *School Libraries Worldwide*.

My research showed the demonstration of OCBs and ECBs can positively impact the school environment. But as much as I would encourage school librarians to demonstrate these behaviors, I would also caution that school librarians need to make sure they sustain themselves first before they can adequately help others. Beyond the measures of self-care to protect physical and mental health, school librarians should seek out opportunities for professional development. Getting involved with state and national professional organizations is a great way to provide the nourishing contacts with others in the school library field, a step frequently cited by participants as a source of strength. There are now a greater range of online opportunities to transcend barriers like time, physical location, and cost.

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