



School library advocacy literature in the United States: An exploratory content analysis



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 26 March 2013

Received in revised form 14 October 2014

Accepted 28 April 2015

Available online 2 September 2015

ABSTRACT

This exploratory conceptual content analysis describes the published school library advocacy literature in the United States from 2001–2011. In 47 articles, the advocacy efforts undertaken, the responsible parties, the target populations, and goals and reasons for advocacy were examined. In all, 372 separate advocacy efforts were found. Of these, 168 efforts outlined tangible results of advocacy efforts while 204 efforts described strategies or techniques for advocacy but did not identify an outcome. The general school community was the most predominant target population for advocacy. Advocacy efforts specifically targeting school administrators and teachers were an infrequent target. The advocacy goal mentioned most frequently in the literature was enhancing awareness. Most (83%) advocacy activities were initiated by school librarians or an individual in the school library field. School library researchers should address the dearth of empirical and theoretical work on both the practice and impact of advocacy on the profession.

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1. Introduction

Advocacy for the profession is a topic of discussion in many education related fields, including school counseling (Myers & Sweeney, 2004; Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002), health education (Tappe & Galer-Unti, 2001), music education (Mark, 2005), and physical education (Boyce & Rikard, 2008; Gard & Wright, 2001). There is a significant body of practitioner literature about school library advocacy. However, a thorough search of multiple databases revealed only one empirical article on school library advocacy (Ewbank, 2011). It appears that the topic of school library advocacy is virtually unanalyzed. Through an exploratory conceptual content analysis, this article describes themes and concepts in the United States published school library advocacy literature between 2001–2011.

Advocacy is defined as “a kind of political action addressed to a governing body with the aim of influencing public policy outputs” (von Winter, 2011, p. 29). Several library associations have developed expanded and contextualized definitions of advocacy. These definitions are provided in Table 1.

This study utilizes AASL's operational definition of advocacy. The American Association of School Librarians' definition is primarily concerned with building partnerships and alliances so that others may act on behalf of the school library program. The AASL's focus on advocacy

is in response to the declining rate of school librarians in the United States, where only 64% of K-12 public schools in the United States employ a state certified librarian (<http://keithcurrylance.com/2010-national-statistics-on-librarian-positions-by-school-district/>) and in some areas of the country, the percentage is markedly less.

The American Library Association (ALA) and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) advocate for school libraries and librarians at the federal level. Advocacy around the pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also known as No Child Left Behind), U.S. federal legislation that greatly influences education policy in the United States, is one example. The associations also advocated for maintaining dedicated funding for the national *Improving Literacy through School Libraries* program, which establishes U.S. state goals of having a school library staffed by a licensed school librarian in each public school, and allows state and local professional development funds to be used for recruiting and training school librarians (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advleg/federallegislation/eduleg/schoollibraries>).

Furthermore, the ALA worked with Rep. Jack Reed (Democrat, Rhode Island) and Rep. Raul Grijalva (Democrat, Arizona) to re-introduce the Strengthening Kids' Interest in Learning and Libraries (SKILLS) act in 2011. This is one of the most recent advocacy attempts by the American Library Association (ALA, 2011a). Other national advocacy initiatives recently taken up include President Barack Obama's proposed American Jobs Act (ALA, 2011b), which allocates USD\$30 billion for K-12 education. Some of the funds can be applied to school libraries and librarians. Another advocacy initiative involves the U.S. National Broadband Plan, preserving E-Rate funding (a discount provided to schools and libraries for

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Table 1
Definitions of advocacy.

Library Association	Definition of Advocacy
Canadian Association of Public Libraries (2001) http://www.cla.ca/divisions/capl/advocacy/	Advocacy is a planned, deliberate, sustained effort to raise awareness of an issue. It's an ongoing process in which support and understanding are built incrementally over an extended period of time.
Australian School Library Association (2005) http://www.kb.com.au/news/advocacy-for-school-libraries.htm	Advocacy attempts to influence the perceptions of the target audience by connecting with their agenda to demonstrate how the school library and the services of the teacher-librarian can advance the position of the school as an information literate learning community.
American Association of School Librarians (2005) http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aasliissues/advocacy/definitions.cfm	Advocacy is the on-going process of building partnerships so that others will act for and with you, turning passive support into educated action for the library media program.

telecommunications). The American Library Association actively solicited comments and feedback regarding the formation of a national Digital Literacy Corps (ALA, 2012).

Despite the focus on advocacy, in almost every state in the U.S., school librarian eliminations continue (<http://goo.gl/maps/vEkH>). There is a dearth of research on whether advocacy increases the likelihood of retaining librarian positions and promotes the value of the school library program staffed by a credentialed librarian. The impact of school library advocacy by individual school librarians or other stakeholders is not known. Furthermore, the impact of library associations' advocacy for the profession remains unexamined. An exploratory content analysis of the current literature is the first step in analyzing the phenomenon of school library advocacy.

2. Problem statement

To date, the literature on school library advocacy has been unanalyzed. Julien, Pecoskie and Reed (2011, p. 19) contend that “[content analysis] research... can be expected to motivate discussion about progress in the area and about ways in which to promote further growth in directions agreed upon by the scholarly community. Researchers can identify models to improve their work and identify trends”. This study aims to establish an understanding of school library advocacy as outlined in the current literature. A study such as this has not been undertaken, and thus may provide a needed perspective as scholars in the field continue to explore school library advocacy. The research questions guiding the study are:

1. What advocacy efforts are being undertaken?
2. Who is responsible for advocacy?
3. Who are the target populations of advocacy?
4. What are the goals of advocacy?
5. What are the reasons for advocacy?

3. Literature review

3.1. Organizational evolution as a framework for advocacy

Advocacy is one of the means that humans have developed to intervene in the evolutionary processes of organizational systems (March, 1994). Organizational systems evolve when there is disequilibrium in their environments (Baum & Singh, 1994). When organizational systems question the assumptions, policies, and values that led to a problem, learning through change occurs with repeated attempts are made to solve a problem. Advocacy is a problem-solving process for the entire system. When actors encounter a threat to the library program, they sometimes attempt to solve this problem with advocacy activities.

However, advocacy can be an uphill battle. Barriers to change in schools include the failure to recognize the vulnerability of the change process to powerful cultural influences (Dooley, 1995). Organizational culture consists of “deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that members have about their organization or its work” (Peterson & Spencer, 1991, p. 142).

The U.S. public school system is multi-layered and multi-faceted. Federal policies propel change at the national level, individual states are responsible for implementing change, and within states, local entities (school districts) manifest this change and make decisions about how to best educate students. This results in a complex organizational system in which advocacy is undertaken. There are instances of advocacy at the federal, state, and local levels. Most individuals have had some interaction with the public school system (most commonly as a student), and therefore have a stake in creating its culture. However, this is one of the many factors that give rise to citizens being interested in its values and how it plays out in the societal context. For example, citizens may be interested in the success of the public school system as a driver of economic development or as a facilitator of democratic values. Citizens may be interested in advocacy for school libraries for these and other reasons. Therefore, organizational evolution is a complex enterprise in the U.S. public school system, as it is made up of many separate entities. Individuals may be interested and engage in advocacy at the local, state, or federal level.

3.2. Research on advocacy for the professions

Numerous educational researchers have studied the role of advocacy in their respective professions. This section will review the existing literature on advocacy for similar professions, including school counseling, health education, music education, physical education, and school libraries. These professions are analogous to school librarianship because they are often marginalized within the K-12 public school system (Dodds, 2006; Elpus, 2007; Myers & Sweeney, 2004) and are among the first positions to be eliminated when a financial crisis occurs.

School counseling has a robust empirical literature base on advocacy for the profession. The American Counseling Association endorsed its advocacy competencies in 2003 (http://www.counseling.org/Resources/Competencies/Advocacy_Competencies.pdf). The competencies have three levels: the client/student level, the school/community level and the public area level, where “advocacy... requires the use of technology skills, an understanding of systems, and the ability to develop relationships with various constituencies” (Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007).

The school counseling profession has a long history of client advocacy rooted in social justice (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). In 1997, Eriksen highlighted the dearth of research on advocacy relative to the counseling profession. As a result, more attention has turned to advocacy in the counseling literature. Eriksen (1999) then conducted a study to define an initial understanding of counselor advocacy. She interviewed 28 counseling professionals who were advocates. The counseling professionals indicated two elements essential for advocacy: first, that counselors use the same attributes in advocacy that make them excellent counselors (such as relationship-building, effective communication, and inclusiveness), and second, that a clear sense of professional identity be established. Since Eriksen's initial study, various studies on school counseling advocacy for the profession have been conducted (e.g. Clemens, Shipp, & Kimbel, 2011; Dodson, 2009; Field & Baker, 2004; Holmberg, 2012; Kircher, 2007).

Furthermore, Myers and Sweeney (2004) conducted a national survey on advocacy for the counseling profession. They anticipated that the

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