Chapter 10
Collaborative Learning Design in Librarian and Teacher Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

This chapter details some of the different learning design models and collaboration styles that promote effective partnerships between classroom teachers and school librarians. It evaluates types of lesson designs that lend themselves most easily to teacher-librarian collaborative partnerships. It reviews partner and student activities that reflect on design elements of delivery and internalization of concepts and skills by students. The decision makers behind the technologies, those who engineer, program, record, demonstrate, and design the computing resources that are ubiquitous in learning today, are the architects for student learning. In these ways, collaborative partnerships between librarians and teachers of all grades and subjects can result in improved student performance.

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of collaboration between classroom teachers and school librarians are certainly documented throughout the body of professional literature for these disciplines, especially in journal articles, research studies and literature reviews (Callison, 1997; Loertscher, 2000; Woolls, 2001; Overall 2007). Detailed accounts of practical collaborations also appear in a variety of reports on successful grant projects, longitudinal studies of school library impact, and accounts of educators' personal experiences (Lance, Welborn, & Hamilton-Pennell, 1993; Chesky & Meyer,

2004; Milbury, 2005; Schultz-Jones, 2009). Collaboration is a path towards increased levels of professional development for teachers, especially since these activities cannot be replicated via mere attendance at a workshop or training program. The real listening, negotiations, and compromises which teachers experience during a collaborative learning design project are seen as clearly worth the effort when an obvious increase in student achievement is the result. This chapter will detail some of the different models and collaboration styles which promote effective learning design partnerships between classroom teachers and school librarians. Since most of these frameworks

are of universal design, and incorporate multiple types of technologies, they can be replicated and adapted across grade levels and in schools with varying degrees of technology integration and readiness for the collaborative process.

Strong learning design attempts to a) take a snapshot of student abilities and interest at a specific moment in time, and b) take a panoramic shot of what students have learned up to that point, as well as where they might be going from that point forward. Specifically, it identifies what the possibilities and opportunities are for students' future learning of the concept or skill at hand. Teachers and librarians, especially when they collaborate, are in a unique position to determine the ways that content and skills are intertwined at the most significant points of learning. Students are easily bored when learning content alone, especially for topics not of their own choosing – and any skills performed in isolation practically ensure that those skills will not be retained overtime (Vygotsky, 1978). Successful learning design strikes a balance between content and skills in each subject area, a balance which can lead to meaningful learning. Collaboration with library professionals is an effective method of achieving this balance; analyzing the crossroads at which meaningful learning, and not just good teaching, can take place.

Several different styles of collaboration can be used by teachers and librarians (who may also be called School Library Media Specialists, or SLMSs) who partner in delivering information literacy instruction through strong learning design. Shared effort in designing lesson objectives, procedures, and assessments for the students is the ideal goal of these partnerships, but may not be practically or fully realized given curricular demands, lack of common planning time, or a range of other challenges. However, the following collaboration styles, lesson types and frameworks, and ways to assess collaborative activity among staff and students, may provide enough variety to encourage partnerships in both large and small

initiatives. These elements of learning design are crafted simultaneously, and students should experience them dynamically, as integrated parts of a cohesive new learning experience.

Learning design is comprised of more than just writing a lesson plan or creating directions for a project. It also involves the direction and trajectory of learning, decisions on pacing and scope, objectives and goal alignments, and attention to differences and abilities among individual students. Learning design addresses the big picture and nature of students' internalization of concepts throughout the entirety of the lesson. It seeks to understand the context of learning and seeks out additional connections to further learning, both during and after lesson implementation. Kuhlthau and Maniotes (2010) encourage us to ask of our schools and libraries: "Is the expertise available being tapped? Who are the experts that might add to the resources in the school and on the Web? How are available and varied resources currently being used to meet the information needs of 21st-century learners?" (p. 21). Educators aim to meet students' needs with their instructional choices as determined from their professional assessments of those students' knowledge, skills, and abilities. Much like the essential questions in inquiry activities, an overarching vision of understanding and competency building must be identified. Naturally, design efforts work best when these two things are in alignment. For example, student projects do not need to always be displayed using technology, and it is the skilled instructor who can determine the best methods of teaching a concept or task by matching it to its most effective instructional strategy, whether technological or not.

The same is true for learning design partnerships; even within the same class of students, some activities are best taught in a team fashion, and others are best taught with one educator leading and the other assisting. Or, an outside expert should be invited to present, with the teachers assisting him or her in various ways. Remember that these collaborative styles are not based on personality

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