Chapter 19
Collaboration + Integration= A Library Program Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

Michelle L. Maniaci
School District of Fort Atkinson, USA

ABSTRACT

Collaboration between classroom teachers and school librarians is widely promoted as best practice. While the concept itself is easily understood, the path to collaboration can seem elusive. One of the essential tasks of school librarians is to integrate information and technology skills with the core curriculum. This translates into instruction that has an authentic purpose and occurs at the time of need. This chapter portrays collaboration as one of several important aspects of a small elementary school library program in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. Highlights of the program include flexible scheduling, curriculum, standards and assessment, and stakeholder support. Research presented in the chapter provides a rationale for adding flexible scheduling, curricular and standards-based focus, and assessment to a library program in order to promote collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

I became an elementary school librarian in 1996. As an undergrad taking classes to obtain my initial library certification, I had grand visions of my first job. According to my plan, I would work in one building in a medium-sized school district in a suburban area of Wisconsin. My library would be automated and have a full-time aide. My classes would be implemented through a flexible library schedule so that I could collaborate with classroom teachers on technology projects and I would have a library curriculum outlining what I was supposed to teach. Needless to say, if you look up "naïve" in the dictionary, you will see my picture.

What really happened is I was hired the week before school started to be an elementary librarian in a small district in a very rural town. There were two elementary schools, and though each one had a full-time library aide, I had to split my time between the two buildings. There was no automation. In fact, one library had a paper card catalog that had not been kept current, and though the other had a computerized catalog, there was no equipment for electronic checkout and no look-up stations in the library for students to search for books. It is amazing how skilled you become at knowing Dewey numbers when you have no catalog to refer to. I had fixed, 30-minute classes and no curriculum. I did not collaborate with classroom teachers.

Fast forward to today. I'm in my fifth library job, working in one building in a small school with about 300 kids. Our library operates on a flexible schedule, I collaborate with every classroom teacher on technology integration projects and our district has a formal information and technology literacy curriculum at the elementary level that includes report card assessment. The library houses two computer labs and has a robust collection of print and digital resources. My principal, the director of instruction, the superintendent and our school board members have a clear understanding of what librarians do and support our ever-evolving role. It is truly my dream job.

Out of its many ideal characteristics, it is collaboration with classroom teachers that I value most about my job. However, upon looking at the path to teacher-librarian collaboration in our building, I noticed that other factors could not be overlooked. Flexible scheduling, curriculum, standards and assessment, as well as the support of administrators and school board members all contribute to my impact on students and the overall success of my library program. All of them put together are what make up the dreamy situation in which I find myself, a situation in which the whole process of collaboration is much, much greater than the sum of its parts.

WHY COLLABORATE?

Frazier (2010) outlined benefits of teacher/librarian collaboration and found they exist for both staff and students.

One benefit to staff is access to and assistance with new technology and a variety of material types. Some staff members are reluctant to experiment with technology on their own; others may want to use new tools but have difficulty finding time to learn how to use them seamlessly in front of students. Collaborating with a librarian can help eliminate the anxiety of introducing something new, as well as the work involved in preparing to teach students the how-to aspects of a piece of technology.

Collaboration also provides extra support to teachers when they team up with a librarian on inquiry-based projects. Librarians offer priceless assistance on all aspects of research including guiding students through a formal research process, citing sources, plagiarism pitfalls, access to both print and nonprint resources and resource evaluation. The American Association of School Librarians' (AASL) Position Statement on Flexible Scheduling (2011b) referred to classroom teachers as "subject specialists" (experts of content and student needs) and librarians as "process specialists" (experts of resources and student inquiry). When these two fields of expertise meld together, learning becomes a win-win situation for everyone involved, especially students.

The student benefits of teacher/librarian collaboration Frazier noted include less anxiety during the initial stages of research, greater exposure to digital tools and resources and, most notable, higher scores on student achievement tests. Keith Curry Lance and his colleagues at Library Research Service did extensive research on the latter point, including library impact studies in approximately 20 states (Lamborne, 2010). These studies revealed common characteristics of high quality libraries and librarians. When librarians took on a leadership role and participated in a handful of key activities, collaboration being one of them, students' academic performance rose. In Lamborne's video summarizing the research (3:34), Lance stated, "Basically anything that school librarians do that gets them involved in an integral way with instruction seems to contribute to students doing better."

Other significant findings from these studies on the topic of teacher-librarian collaboration were summarized by graduate students in the School Libraries and Information Technologies program at Mansfield University (2011):

Related Content

Leveraging Multitasking Opportunities to Increase Motivation and Engagement in Online Classrooms: An Action Research Case Study
Glenda A. Gunterand Robert F. Kenny (2014). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 17-30).*
www.irma-international.org/article/leveraging-multitasking-opportunities-to-increase-motivation-and-engagement-in-online-classrooms/119667

E-Learning Accessibility Model: A Culture of Collaboration and Outcomes Assessment
Henry C. Alphin (2013). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 18-42).*
www.irma-international.org/article/e-learning-accessibility-model/78909

Ideas and Implementation of an Internet-Based System of Qualification for Teachers in a Federally Structured Education System: Using the Example of Economic Education Online (Germany)
Michael Koch (2016). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 46-64).*
www.irma-international.org/article/ideas-and-implementation-of-an-internet-based-system-of-qualification-for-teachers-in-a-federally-structured-education-system/147745

Attention as the Base of the Development of Learning Supported by UXD Technologies
Samirna Collazosand Bayron Mauricio Mazabuel (2020). *UXD and UCD Approaches for Accessible Education (pp. 113-126).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/attention-as-the-base-of-the-development-of-learning-supported-by-uxd-technologies/247875

Activity Theory and the Design of Pedagogic Planning Tools
Elizabeth Masterman (2009). *Handbook of Research on Learning Design and Learning Objects: Issues, Applications, and Technologies (pp. 209-227).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/activity-theory-design-pedagogic-planning/20883