Chapter 3

Collaboration is the Answer – What's the Question?
Using a Framework of Guided Questions to Inform Collaborative Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the models of collaboration, presents technological resources and avenues through which collaborative interactions can occur, the establishment of procedures, and steps around a set of question phrases and ideas, which can be used as a collaborative structure. It showcases the successful collaborative planning efforts and products of a practicing school librarian, her faculty, and their students.

INTRODUCTION

A culture of collaboration in K-12 schools is fostered through individuals working together to establish attitudes, behaviors, habits and operations that are mutually beneficial to the students, school librarian, and other educators within those schools. Researchers (Montiel-Overall, 2005; Marcoux, 2007; Hickel, 2006; Immroth & Lukenbill, 2007; Montiel-Overall, 2006; Frazier, 2010; Montiel-Overall & Jones, 2011) have worked to identify factors that can contribute to successful collaborations and to create models of the levels of collaborative endeavors that might exist as

teachers and school librarians move from lesser levels of interaction to true collaborative planning, teaching, assessment, and reflection.

Loertscher's initial taxonomy (1988) detailed levels of collaboration and involvement in the school library program. Based on eleven steps ranging from "no involvement" to full "curriculum development" the taxonomy provides a scale by which school librarians can evaluate their collaborative planning and teaching activities. Likewise, others have proposed similar scales or continuums to analyze the depth to which the school librarian is immersed in the co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessing of student research

with other educators." Hickel (2006) proposes a set of eight "ingredients" which can increase the quality and amount of collaboration school librarians can design. Montiel-Overall (2006) suggests that individually, the school librarian and teacher move from a level of "interest," through "innovation," "intensity," "integration," and arrive at "implementation." Marcoux's (2007) model lists five steps, from "consumption" at the lowest level, to "connection," "cooperation," "coordination," and, at the highest level, "collaboration." In the consumption level, students simply utilize or consume the resources in the school library. In connection, the librarian is generally informed about the lessons or activities that will take place within the library, but not involved in the planning. When the level of cooperation is reached, there is a greater level of interaction with the students to not only consume resources, but to use them most effectively to complete research projects. In the coordination phase, the library staff also has advance knowledge of the assignments, topics, project details, and overall research timeline. At the highest level of collaboration, the librarian works with the classroom teacher to jointly plan, teach, and assess student work. This chapter will focus on this highest level of librarians and teachers working together as instructional partners. It proposes a set of guiding questions to review the conditions and motivation of the individuals involved in collaboration to achieve high levels of success. These are:

- **Communication and Language:** What should we say?
- **Snapshots or Targets:** Where should we go?
- **Conditions and the Environment:** When and where should we work?
- **Dispositions and Characteristics:** How should we act?
- **Resources and Tools:** What do we need to have?

When these questions are successfully addressed by the collaborative partners within a school, the planning and implementation of student research projects and learning activities can flourish. In addressing each question, a number of technological tools and resources can be utilized to increase the productivity of the collaborative team. The technological tools used can be as simple as an electronic organizational template maintained by the school librarian to ensure all team members share a common understanding of their roles in the collaborative project; to more sophisticated tools like Websites for organizing resources, and videos for sharing collaboration ideas.

BACKGROUND

Collaboration has been a key word in the school librarian's vocabulary for more than two decades. When *Information Power* (ALA/AECT, 1998) was revised, the intense focus on the role of the school librarian, the accepted title at the time, gave direction to both those practicing in the field and those who were in education programs for a number of years. Many professional school librarians were already accepted as teachers, program administrators, and information specialists. Most, experienced classroom teachers themselves, were skilled in lesson planning and classroom management techniques. The role of program administrator also seemed self-evident, as a physical space of books, audio-visual equipment, budgets and schedules needed someone to lead and direct activities. When states began to encourage and require a masters-level degree for school librarians, most felt secure in the role of information specialists, possessing the knowledge achieved through that advanced training to both locate information and teach others how to effectively use research and reference tools. However, the fourth role of "instructional partner" altered (Cooper & Bray, 2011) the way that school librarians must interact with classroom teachers to bring about changes in

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