

Chapter 6

School Librarians as Significant Other: Using Online Professional Learning Communities for the Development of Pre-Service Teachers

Lara M. Luetkehans
Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA

Rebecca D. Hunt
Northern Illinois University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores three strands of research: professional learning communities, the significant others in the development of pre-service teachers, and teacher-school librarian collaboration to develop a strategy for using Online Professional Learning Communities (OPLC) as a means for fostering career-long, mutually beneficial collaborations among teachers and school librarians. A previous study of such an OPLC comprised of pre-service and in-service teachers, university faculty, and school librarians is described. The role of the school librarian as a member of the OPLC is examined, particularly as a significant other (Karmos & Jacko, 1977) in the professional development of pre-service teachers. Recommendations include the key elements of creating OPLCs that are inclusive and demonstrate the value school librarians bring to this community.

INTRODUCTION

Collaborative relationships are mutually beneficial for teachers and school librarians. Collaboration fosters professional development and networking, advocacy, and improved practice (Kimmel, 2012; Montiel-Overall, 2008; Moreillon, 2008). Practice in developing collaboration skills should begin with initial preparation. Westheimer (2008)

recommends that professional learning communities for new teachers include both novice and veteran teachers working together around a common model of “teacher as learner.” In this chapter, we will describe a model for creating an online professional learning community that includes the school librarian as a “significant other” during the student teaching experience (Karmos and Jacko, 1977).

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This chapter aims to demonstrate how the use of an online professional learning community that includes pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers, university faculty, and school librarians provides a solid foundation for the professional development of teachers and their future collaborations with school librarians. The authors will introduce the rationale and theory underpinning teacher-school librarian collaboration, pre-service teacher development, and professional learning communities, a lived example, and findings from previous research. Additionally, this chapter will promote the mutually beneficial outcomes for the school librarians and pre-service teachers who engage in a professional learning community. The chapter concludes with specific strategies for using online professional learning communities to facilitate school librarian-teacher collaboration early in a teacher's career and possible areas for future research.

BACKGROUND

School Librarian and Teacher Collaboration

The collaboration of school librarians and teachers has a long history. The evolution of this history is tied to official standards and guidelines developed over the decades in the field of librarianship. Doll (2005) describes the early evolution of the standards and how the role of the librarian evolved over time. What has remained unchanged is the expectation of the librarian; to provide access to appropriate materials and serve as an instructor. With the publication of *Standards for School Media Programs* (AASL & DAVI, 1969) the role of the librarian expanded to include the assisting of teachers to integrate technology into the curriculum. The standards introduced the terms “media” and “media specialist.” Neuman (2004) states, “It is important to note that school librarians—now library media specialists—have spent decades

taking on increasing responsibility for providing instruction and for integrating technology into the curriculum as well as for providing library services” (p. 500). *Media Programs: District and School* (AASL & AECT, 1975) is the sixth set of standards that further elevated the school librarian's responsibilities to include a role as instructional technologist and designer. In 1988 the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association for Educational Computing and Technology (AECT) published *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*. These standards described the need for a different relationship between teachers and school librarians: “a partnership among the library media specialist, district level personnel, administrators, teachers and parents” (p. 2). In 1998, AASL and AECT published *Information Power: Building Partnerships for learning*. This revision to the standards introduced the term “information literacy” which is defined as: “the ability to find and use information” (p. 1). The standards also suggest that school librarians work to become partners in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum. The standards also include the assessment of students. In order to achieve this goal, school librarians must gain support from the school's administration and cultivate positive relationships with teachers.

In 2006 the AASL Vision Summit convened to participate in the rewriting of the school library program guidelines. The AASL Guidelines Editing Task Force was charged with using the information gathered to develop guidelines for the 21st-century school library program. *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* is the outcome of this collaboration identifying the roles of school librarian as a “Leader,” “Instructional Partner,” “Information Specialist,” “Teacher,” and “Program Administrator.” The collection of data from school librarians and administrators identified key features that school librarians need to meet the education challenges in the 21st century. Synthesis of the information produced

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