

Chapter 7

Preparing Stakeholders for the School Librarian's Instructional Partnership Role: Whose Responsibility Is It?

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ABSTRACT

Although the American Association of School Librarians and researchers in the field have identified the instructional partner role as critical to the future of school librarianship, many school librarians report that their colleagues and administrators are unaware of the importance of this role, and that they are reluctant to practice or support it. Other library stakeholders report that school librarians themselves are not adequately prepared to effectively practice this role. While many practitioners believe it is the university's job to prepare preservice educators and administrators to participate in collaborative planning, teaching, and assessment, some university faculty believe that until classroom-library instructional partnerships are consistently practiced in the field, preservice education efforts to instill this model will fall flat. This chapter reports on an in-depth literature review of the research-based evidence for the value of successful instructional partnerships and the barriers that have been identified in enacting them. An analysis of the literature suggests a comprehensive effort on the part of all stakeholders—both in the field and the academy—is necessary to ensure that the work of school librarians is integrated into the classroom curriculum where it can make a measurable impact on student learning outcomes.

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TWO PERSPECTIVES ON PREPARING STAKEHOLDERS FOR CLASSROOM-LIBRARY INSTRUCTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

When I was a practicing school librarian, I often experienced frustration with the lack of understanding on the part of classroom teachers, specialists, and administrators with regard to my role as an instructional partner. I found that many classroom teachers, although they participated in collaborative planning at grade levels, were satisfied with teaching in isolation from their colleagues and did not consider me a collaborative planning or coteaching partner. Likewise, some principals with whom I served, who had been classroom teachers and had also taught in isolation, were unaware of the potential of instructional partnerships to positively impact student learning outcomes and improve educator proficiency. Even today some administrators who promote a Professional Learning Community model for school improvement do not appear to understand that the school librarian and library program could and should be an integral part of instructional improvement efforts (Hughes-Hassell, Brasfield, & Dupree, 2012).

In library school I was encouraged—no, commanded—to conduct relentless outreach to all potential collaborators and to bring the reluctant into the fold. I was taught that I would be required to educate my principal about my role as an instructional partner and demonstrate, with measurable data, how coteaching with my colleagues contributed to student success. While I accepted these as *rules* in the profession, I always hoped that the need for this type of outreach would be the exception. I wished there were classroom teachers and principals who already knew my value as an instructional leader and who would flock to the library to work with me and advocate for classroom-library collaboration. More than once I heard myself say, “If only my colleagues

were taught about my instructional partner role during their preservice training, I wouldn’t have to work so hard to promote my work and the library program.”

Later, as a university educator, I understood how difficult it is to overcome conditioning. Research in education attests to the fact that classroom teachers, regardless of teacher preparation and program interventions, teach the way they were taught as K-12 students (Lasley, 1980; Pajares, 1992). I suspect the same is true for the preservice school librarians in my graduate courses. Many school librarian candidates, either classroom teachers or school librarians serving with emergency certification, do not come to the university with established models for coplanning, coteaching, and coassessing student learning. When these candidates go out into the field to conduct their practicum experiences, many report that their inservice school librarian mentors do not practice the instructional partner role and do not coteach with colleagues.

Before teaching full time in a library science program, I served as the lead faculty for an undergraduate K-8 teacher preparation program. I indoctrinated these future educators in the benefits to students and to themselves of classroom-library instructional partnerships (Moreillon, 2008). Since joining a library science faculty I have made every effort to collaborate with my colleagues in the College of Education who teach preservice classroom teacher and school principal candidates. Along with doctoral students and graduate assistants, I have provided cotaught demonstration lessons in preservice classroom teacher courses and presentations for preservice principals about how to supervise and evaluate their school librarians. I have provided workshops for K-8 preservice teachers to instill in them the benefits classroom-library instructional partnerships. I have even had the opportunity to teach an undergraduate course called *Library Materials for Children* in which

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