

Chapter 17

Invaluable Collaboration

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents examples of content-focused collaborations that illustrate how a school librarian can build collaboration with teachers. By describing actual lessons and units that were developed collaboratively with teachers, this chapter gives readers a glimpse at what one particular school library program happens to look like, in hopes that a more concrete picture of school librarian-teacher collaboration emerges. This chapter covers five key lessons new or struggling school librarians can review as they develop their school library programs.

INTRODUCTION

New trends, new curricula, and expectations have come with the advent of 21st century learning, leading to new expectations placed on school library programs and school librarians (Loertscher, 2011). These new expectations mean that school librarians have the opportunity to become instructional leaders, impacting the whole school. Linton (2012) contends that the current role of school librarians has shifted nationwide “becoming more focused on helping teachers integrate technology and digital content in their classrooms...assuming new roles, such as empowering teachers with technological skills, participating in professional learning communities with teachers, and offering professional development on accessing and using digital content” (p. 25). Furthermore, practitioners as school librarian, Toni Buzzeo, urge us to engage in data-driven collaboration, whereby we work

with teachers to align our collaboration efforts directly with test data indicating student learning needs (2010). Therefore, the trend of school librarians being an active part of the teaching role in the school will likely ensure the continuing need for our profession in years to come.

When co-teaching and assisting teachers in the development of high quality lessons the school librarian demonstrates that he/she is a vital contributor to student learning. Unfortunately, as I have taught training sessions locally and regionally at conferences, I often encounter school librarians who tell me that their teachers do not plan lessons or units with them because they feel that they cannot spare class time away from curriculum for research or special projects. It is my hope that this chapter will help school librarian voice to stakeholders (e.g. administrators, classroom teachers) why it is critical that collaborative partnerships be a key component of the school

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4361-1.ch017

library program. My principal, Stephanie Gentry, explains: “We cannot live without collaboration in education these days. It is imperative that we work together as a team, whether that is within our subject area, vertically, or interdisciplinary. It is even more important that our children see how we collaborate to foster success. If we continue to model those strategies, we are teaching our students even more than we think!” Operating with this as our mantra, as teacher-librarians we can become indispensable at our schools. This chapter contains five key points illustrated with examples from my particular school that can serve as lessons for new or struggling school librarians:

1. Strive to develop lessons students *want* to do.
2. Realize that collaboration will build over time.
3. Keep technology and information skills up-to-date.
4. Share your vision and advertise your services.
5. Save your energy for what really matters.

LESSON ONE: STRIVE TO DEVELOP LESSONS STUDENTS WANT TO DO

It has been my experience that our students are much more engaged in their learning when we develop lessons that use technology. At our school we observe that students make greater cognitive gains when we ask them to create content based on information they acquire and synthesize during the research process. Irma Jones, a seventh grade social studies teacher at our school, stated in a personal e-mail response to a library survey: “Our students are so comfortable using technology that we as teachers would be foolish not to capitalize on its use. From personal experience, I have noticed most, if not all, students become actively engaged [when creating and researching using technology] and work at their own pace. Therefore, another benefit of using technology with students is the [ability to differentiate instruction].”

There are a few educational Web 2.0 technologies we heavily use at our school. Edmodo (a secure social networking site provided through a school district account) has been valuable for students to post projects and self-evaluations of their work. We also use Animoto. We recently completed Animoto book projects where students worked in collaborative groups to create visual book talks about their novels. They used Audacity to record narration and add music (learning to edit with precision for volume and length) then published the final project in Animoto using pictures. One exciting feature of this project was the integration of student evaluation using Edmodo. Students accessed and judged the Animoto projects, selecting the best three from each class. Using a scoring rubric, they justified their selections; they also used this rubric to evaluate their own project. Students who participated were engaged, often scrambling to do their best work, honing a product over and over. I have collaborated with teachers to create lessons that incorporate a wide array of tools such as Glogster, Livebinders, avatar makers like Voki, Voice Thread and creative commons sites for locating freely available pictures and music (to name a few). Everyone wins when we utilize students’ interests in Web 2.0 technology. In fact, Cunningham and Gonzalez (2009), write of the value of using educational Web 2.0 tools and sites.

Over time as I have partnered with teachers in this way, I have learned valuable points concerning effective design with each of these tools. As an example, this last year as we used Livebinders, the classroom teachers and I learned that it is most successfully used by students when the tabs and sub tabs are carefully organized in the manner in which they will be used, with the assignments inserted into the binder and with carefully crafted written directions in place. I emphasize to teachers that this kind of unit, if well designed, can take time on the front-end, but eventually facilitates student learning in a significant way. Many of the teachers who used some of the 21st century technology this year learned that the creation of high-quality units such as these took more time to create in advance

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