Two Heads Are Better than One: Influencing Preservice Classroom Teachers' Understanding and Practice of Classroom-Library Collaboration

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Abstract

Two Heads Are Better than One: The Factors Influencing the Understanding and Practice of Classroom-Library Collaboration proposed to identify the factors involved in educating future K–8 classroom teachers about collaboration for instruction wison foomon wed to i3(about)ateoonsomc ts were enrolled in a teacher preparation program facilitated by the researcher, a former SLMS. The goal of this mixed-methods case study was to suggest critical components of preservice education, student teaching, and first-year teaching experiences that influence novice classroom teachers' classroom-library collaborations. This article provides an overview of the study, a review of relevant literature, and the data collected, including findings from four surveys as well as other data sources. This study shows that interventions during preservice education were important influencers. However, the findings clearly indicate that the educators serving in K–8 school library positions and the supports, or lack thereof, for classroom-library collaboration during student teaching and first-year classroom teaching were the most influential factors in determining whether or not these beginning educators collaborated with SLMSs for instruction. ifndh -1.65ifndh

- x Which of the classroom-library collaboration-focused learning engagements (interventions) during their preservice education influenced preservice teachers' thinking about school library media programs, the instructional role of SLMSs, and the benefits of classroom-library collaboration?

- x Which behaviors of SLMSs, preservice teachers, and their mentor teachers influenced the study participants' understanding and practice of classroom-library collaboration during their student teaching experience?

- x Which behaviors of the SLMS, novice teachers, and their classroom teacher colleagues influenced their understanding and practice of classroom-library collaboration during their first year of classroom teaching?

Review of Relevant Literature

Collaboration is a buzzword in education today. The concept and practice of teaching and learning in communities of practice is in resurgence. Educational leaders have been extolling the benefits and impact of professional learning communities for many years (DuFour and Eaker 1998; Sergiovanni 1994), and many principals today are inviting faculty to consider the importanc

collaboration can play in K–12 students' learning as well as in teachers' teaching and professional development.

The correlational research studies that document the positive impact of SLMSs and school library media programs on students' achievement on standardized tests should be of interest to every educational stakeholder. In several of these studies, namely Colorado (2000), Oregon (2001), New Mexico (2002), Indiana (2004), and Illinois (2005), library program development and collaborative teaching are aspects of quality library services that can affect students' standardized test scores (Library Research Service 2007). Classroom–library collaboration can help schools meet local, state, and national goals for student achievement.

It seems logical that if preservice teachers practiced collaboration or classroom–library collaboration during their preparation program, they would be more likely to integrate these practices into their future classroom teaching. A program in which preservice classroom teachers and SLMSs practiced co-planning, co-implementing, and co-assessing lessons and units of instruction would be the ideal environment to promote this practice. As that was not available to

My beliefs about the value of classroom-library collaboration for students, classroom teachers,

(Rossman and Rallis 1998; Seidman 1998). Focus group participants were invited to give videotaped testimonials.

Finally, the participants took the fourth and final survey after their first year of actual classroom teaching (appendix D). The survey was provided in hard copy format via U.S. mail or electronic format via email. The questions from the third survey were repeated with the participant as the classroom-library collaborator. The open-ended question regarding support-constraint for collaboration was included to yield data related to the interventions participants had experienced during their preservice education.

The close-ended question responses were tabulated, and the data were shared in terms of percentages. The open-ended questions and the interview data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I did not have preconceived notions about what would most influence participants' understanding and practice of classroom-library collaboration. My qualitative research goal, therefore, was "to reach a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences" (Rossman and Rallis 1998, 85). Although this case study ultimately involved a small number of participants, their experiences shed light on the supports and obstacles experienced by novice teachers in relationship to their practice of classroom-library collaboration.

Interventions

During the first year of the study participants' preservice education, I integrated information, research studies, and hands-on learning experiences with collaboration into four of the study participants' courses. We deconstructed a classroom-library collaborative unit plan. I arranged for a panel discussion presentation by teams of classroom teachers, SLMSs, and principals. We deconstructed classroom-library lesson plans, and I shared anecdotal information about the impact of these lessons on students and educators. I facilitated a simulation of a classroom teacher and SLMS planning session and demonstrated the resulting cotaught lesson.

Classroom–Library Collaborative Unit Plan Deconstruction

During the second course I facilitated for the study participants, Integrated Literacy I: Developmental Literacy and Language Arts in the Elementary School (fall semester 2004), we

of ten diagrams noted that working toward a common goal was a positive aspect of this model.

Increased/integrated resources	9 (60%)
Increased creativity	8 (53%)
Broader perspectives on curriculum	7 (47%)
Support for planning	5 (33%)
Shared responsibility for curriculum	3 (20%)
Increased potential for success	2 (13%)
Lesson/unit assessment	2 (13%)
Increased student achievement/motivation, Integrated curriculum, Modeling partnership or teamwork, Professional growth for teachers, Support for curriculum standards	1 (7%)

These data reflect the responses of the students who were participants in the study rather than all of the students in the course. The participants understood the benefits of collaboration for students. In their teacher aide practicum experiences, they had occasion to work one-on-one and with small groups of students, and realized that lowering the student-teacher ratio assisted both students and teachers. More than half of the participants noted access to more integrated resources, and increased opportunities for creativity. Another of the most encouraging concepts was the understanding that collaboration results in broader perspectives on curriculum. If these benefits became values for these preservice teachers, the likelihood that they would practice collaboration with colleagues, teacher-librarians, and others could increase.

On the other hand, only one of these preservice teachers mentioned student achievement as a benefit of collaboration. Although achievement can be inferred from some of the other concepts, particularly individualized attention for students, it was surprising that more participants did not specifically cite this benefit. This was especially unexpected since one of our texts was Increasing Student Achievement through the Library Media Center: A Guide for Teachers (Loertscher and Achterman 2003).

We continued to read the Loertscher and Achterman text in the social studies methods course, the final course of their first year in the program (spring 2005). We continued our collaboration conversations and worked with Information Power's information literacy standards for students (AASL and AECT 1998) in our social studies explorations. On the final examination for that course, I provided a scenario in which the social studies standards had changed for sixth grade and the textbook did not address a particular concept or historical event. I asked the students what they would do. Six out of fifteen students (40 percent) said they would attempt to collaborate with colleagues; only four (26 percent) mentioned collaboration with the SLMS. The infrequency of a classroom-library collaboration response indicated that they had yet to integrate classroom-

Practicing Collaboration in K–8 Classrooms

Collaborative learning engagements and projects were integrated into all four of the courses I facilitated before the study participants' student teaching experiences. Partners worked collaboratively on many assignments and small groups of up to five people worked on large scale projects such as year

Pre– and Post–Preservice Education Surveys: Data and Analysis

On the prepreservice education survey, the first set of survey questions was designed to access participants' experiences with libraries as K–12 students. In their own K–12 student careers, all but one student attended elementary and middle schools with libraries; all of their high schools had libraries. A total of 87 percent of the participants described themselves as regular library users in elementary school. Nearly a third (27 percent) repor-1(t)-6(i8r)-17(y)o7(y)20(s)-1(q34(a)4(r)3(l)

However, there was a 33 percent increase in the number of study participants who agreed when asked if SLMSs "should be responsible for teaching every area of the curriculum."

Table 3 shows these preservice classroom teachers' constructs related to the roles of SLMSs in instruction and in instructional support both before and after participating in their coursework. The pre-preservice education survey was especially important information because it indicated their preconceptions that would need to be challenged, modified, or changed.

Table 3. Pre- and Post-Preservice Education: Questions Related to the Cooperative and Collaborative Roles of School Library Media Specialists, N=15 (pre) and 15 (post)					
Question: School library media specialists should	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
help classroom teachers find materials.	6 (40%) 9 (60%)	8 (53%) 6 (40%)	1 (7%)		
help classroom teachers design and plan lessons and units of instruction.	5 (33%)	4 (27%) 8 (53%)	9 (60%) 1 (7%)	1 (7%) 1 (7%)	1 (7%)
help classroom teachers co-teach lessons and units of instruction.	3 (20%)	7 (47%) 12 (80%)	6 (40%)		2 (13%)
assess students' learning on projects in which they have taught some or many components.	2 (13%) 3 (20%)	9 (60%) 12 (80%)	3 (20%)		1 (7%)
provide in-services for classroom teachers to help improve teaching practices.	1 (7%) 6 (40%)	6 (40%) 7 (47%)	7 (47%) 0		1 (7%) 2 13%)
school library media specialists should help classroom teachers learn new technologies.	3 (20%) 8 (53%)	8 (53%) 5 (33%)	3 (20%) 1 (7%)		1 (7%) 1 (7%)

The most significant change in these preservice classroom teachers' perception of the role of classroom teachers was in the areas of co-designing, co-planning, and co-teaching lessons and units of instruction. Their surveys indicated a high level of understanding of the role of SLMSs as instructional partners. Preservice teachers raised their expectation for materials support from the school library media specialist. These data also indicated that these educators came to see SLMSs as support for professional development by providing in-services for classroom teachers to help them improve teaching practices.

Table 4 provides data related to questions about library programs, principal support, and the impact of classroom-library collaboration on student achievement. At the end of their preservice

Table 5. Post-Preservice Education: Questions Related to University Classroom Intervention Related to the Practice of Classroom-library Collaboration (N=15)					
Question: During my preservice education,	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
the texts I read about classroom library collaboration influenced my thinking about the role of school library media specialists.	8 (53%)	6 (40%)	1 (7%)		

Table 7. Post-

include collaborative planning or co-teaching. One admitted that she didn't know what students did in the library because she did not stay with her class. One said, "I felt the librarian was there strictly for students, not for the teachers!!!" Another wrote, "I do not believe that the school where I did my student teaching is aware of or would encourage classroom-library collaboration."

Study participants were invited to participate in a small-group focus interview after they completed the post-student teaching survey. Eight people participated. The focus group session was audiotaped and transcribed. The discussion began with the survey questions selected for tables 7 and 8. Participants responded to the questions as well as to each other's comments. Several noted that there was no formal time during the school day for collaboration with colleagues. One person noted that this was a problem with the fixed schedule; the SLMS was never "free." As a result of personality conflicts, the librarian's inexperience or qualifications, or scripted reading programs, several noted that their mentor teachers did not think the library had much to offer.

Many noted that "library time" was a "special" for which they were not responsible and that they had no real knowledge of what children did in the library. The exception was the person who student taught at the middle school level. Although she pursued the SLMS at first, that SLMS responded to her needs, taught her to use library software, and later sent her curriculum support materials without being asked. She could talk with the SLMS during her planning period during the school day, and she actually took her students to the library for instruction in research. She did not, however, collaboratively plan or co-teach with the media specialist.

All eight participants were invited to provide testimonials on the connections between their university classroom and student teaching experiences. Five of the eight volunteered. I videotaped their responses to questions that were raised during the small-group focus interview. Respondents talked about which interventions during their preservice education helped them value classroom-library collaboration as well as their actual experiences while working in the field during student teaching.

Four testimonials centered on the interventions related to classroom-library collaboration. One participant described the collaborative planning session and co-taught science lesson as an intervention that prepared her to seek out collaboration during student teachcolllla6nd siuchct des33se

Table 11.Post-First Year Classroom Teaching Survey: Questions Related to School Libra Media Programs, Principal Support, and Student Achievement (N=12)			
Question: During my first year of classroom teaching,	Yes	No	Don't Know
the school library media program was critical part of the literacy program of the school.	7 (58%)	5 (42%)	
the school schedule provided time for classroom library collaboration.	3 (25%)	9 (75%)	

Pajares, M. F. 1992. Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct.