Strategies for Successful School Librarian and Teacher Collaboration

Authors: Jenna Kammer, Matt King, Allison Donahay, and Heather Koeberl

Jenna Kammer, Ph.D., M.L.S., M.A., assistant professor, University of Central Missouri

Matt King , Ed.S, M.A, school librarian, Discovery Elementary School

Allison Donahay, Ed.S, M.A, school librarian, Lee's Summit High School

Heather Koeberl, Ed.S, M.A, fifth-grade reading and history teacher, Lawson Middle School

ABSTRACT

This qualitative meta-analysis explored the nature of successful collaboration between teachers and school librarians. Three action research studies of school librarians who integrated instruction or curriculum through collaboration with teachers are examined to understand more about what strategies made the collaboration successful. Strategies used by the librarians to collaborate more effectively with teachers are presented, as well as measures that can be used to determine successful collaboration. The findings indicate that the school librarians in this study used many different strategies to lead the collaboration to success. These strategies included initiating the collaboration, securing support from the principal, identifying a shared vision with all collaborators, collecting and analyzing data about the progress of the collaboration, holding

Within this context, school librarians and teachers are engaged in efforts to collaborate at various levels to increase student achievement and be more effective teachers. Some of these efforts include coteaching or supplementing an existing content-area lesson with library instruction. Patricia Montiel-Overall explained that collaboration itself is a critical strategy that educators can use to resolve issues (2005b). Montiel-Overall provided a model of collaboration for teachers and school librarians that includes levels of progressively greTJ -0.003 Tc 2(i)-2(br)3(a)4c(ach)-4(xi)as levels t-4(r3)-25 [(pr)ra prprb976 2.8[(pr)r(6ueia)6(W)-2-i(l)-6(ev)200 t ls3(ns41(t)y(l)-2nuTJ 0 T4-TTJ

standards encourage school librarians to promote collaborative opportunities among their students, as well as work with other teachers and administrators to solve problems and make connections with other content areas in the school.

Judith Warren Little explained that, at one point, one of the criticisms of collaboration in schools was that it lacked conceptual clarity (1990). The difference between working in teams or groups and actual collaboration was established by understanding more about the depth of collaboration that happens between educators. Montiel-Overall developed the Teacher and Librarian Collaboration (TLC) model, which identified four common practices for teacher and school librarian collaboration, each of which requires more commitment and greater investment. These practices are: coordination, cooperation, integrated instruction, and integrated curriculum (2005a; 2005b). Coordination requires less commitment and time between educators as they work together to accomplish tasks. Educators who cooperate are working together to accomplish similar goals, requiring more commitment than coordination, but less than if they were integrating instruction. When educators integrate instruction, they work as equal partners and share instructional responsibility. Educators may use co-planning, co-implementing or co-evaluating to implement instruction for one course or class. Educators who integrate instruction across an entire curriculum are collaborating to "integrate curriculum". Integrated curriculum often must be supported by the principal so that teachers and librarians can have the time and commitment needed to integrate standards across the curriculum to support student learning. Montiel-Overall explained that to successfully collaborate, teachers and librarians must engage as equal partners who integrate instruction or curriculum to work towards shared goals to improve student outcomes (2005a). The TLC model is often used as a framework for teacher and school librarian collaboration. Therefore, this paper uses Montiel-Overall's definition of collaboration as a guide

> Collaboration is a trusting, working relationship between two or more equal participants involved in shared thinking, shared planning and shared creation of integrated instruction. Through a shared vision and shared objectives, student learning opportunities are created that integrate subject content and information literacy by co-planning, co-implementing, and co-evaluating students' progress throughout the instructional process in order to improve student learning in all areas of the curriculum. (Montiel-Overall 2005a, Section A, para. 9)

SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

While integrated instruction or curriculum involving the school library and a content area classroom is a desirable outcome, there are often many barriers to accomplishing this. School librarians often understand the value of collaboration but may find in practice that teachers are resistant to working with a school librarian for various reasons. For example, Latham, Gross, and Witte explained that a teacher in a content area finds it easier to reach goals by working alone rather than with the school librarian, or a teacher may not fully understand the role of the school librarian (2013). Teachers may also experience many conflicts and dilemmas that impact collaborative activity, including policies within the school that impact curriculum, workload, and other instructional demands (Eri and P 2016). Despite these known barriers, school librarians must find strategies that will work for supporting collaboration with content area teachers.

Many factors may influence the success of collaboration. Paul Mattesich and Kirsten Johnson identified twenty-two factors that influence successful collaboration and cluster into six categories: environment, membership characteristics, process and structure, communication,

purpose, and resources (2018), see table 1. Ken Haycock explained that in school libraries, many of these elements, like environment, process and structure, and resources, are out of the control of the school librarian and are impacted by administrative decisions and policies. For example, administrators can foster a collaborative environment by ensuring that all teachers receive professional development on collaboration, as well as scheduling time for teachers to collaborate (2007). Haycock also explained that structure constraints, like fixed schedules, can make it hard to collaborate and force teachers to collaborate after or before school, on weekends, or on days off. Successful collaboration is also impacted by the resources (including time, skills, and funding) available to the collaborative team. However, school librarians and teachers can control their commitment to the collaboration, clarifying roles within the collaboration and developing a shared vision (2007).

Table 1 Factors that lead to successful collaboration

Categories of Successful Collaboration	Factors of Successful Collaboration
Environment	History of collaboration or cooperation in the community; collaborative group seen as a leader in the community; favorable political or social climate
Membership Characteristics	Mutual respect, understanding and trust; appropriate cross section of members; membership belief in the value of collaboration; ability to compromise
Process and Structure	Members share a stake in the process and outcome; multiple layers of decision-making; flexibility; development of clear roles and policy guidelines; adaptability; evaluation and continuous learning
Communication	Open and frequent communication; established informal and formal communication strategies
Purpose	Attainable goals and objectives; shared vision; unique purpose
Resources	Sufficient funds; skilled convener; engaged stakeholders

Source: Content adapted from Mattesi and Johnson 2018.

John Glaser also explained that certain attitudes lead to successful collaboration within an organization. For one, if the organization members have a shared vision and work towards the greater good of all, collaboration is more likely to succeed. Glaser also explained that administrators can align an organization around a common vision, resulting in more coherence within the organization itself (2004). James P. Spillane, Megan Hopkins, and Tracy M. Sweet also explained that investing in the development of social relationships within a school is vital for developing a culture of collaboration. In addition, special attention to the membership of teams is critical for effective collaboration. Factors like physical proximity, experience of the

group members, and teaching the one curricular material are all influential in the frequency of interactions (2015).

Successful collaborations often have at least one member who initiates, leads, manages or is more vocal in the collaboration. Ning Li et al. described this person as an "extra-miler" in that they exhibit more behaviors that show additional work beyond that of other contributors to the collaboration. An extra miler shows more helping characteristics, as well as being more networked in the collaboration. The findings of Li et

and within one program. The primary studies consisted of a teacher and school librarian collaboration that occurred in a public school. In all three studies the collaboration was guided by the TLC model. Each primary study also consisted of a school librarian-service school librarian who initiated and completed a collaborative project with at least one teacher in their building and conducted action research to determine its effectiveness. The school librarians (n=2) and preservice school librarian (n=1) involved in the collaborations were from various levels of schools, including one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. The school librarians collaborated with different types of teachers, including English Language Learning (ELL) teacher, a history teacher, and elementary grade level teachers.

Table 2. Characteristics of primary studies analyzed.

Primary Study	Problem Studied	Intervention Type	Result of Intervention	Number of Participants
Elementary	Depth of collaboration	Professional development	Integrated curriculum	10 teachers; 1 school librarian
Middle	Student engagement	Consultation	Integrated instruction	1 teacher; 1 pre-service school librarian
High	Exclusion of underrepresented group	Consultation	Integrated	

Factors	Critical Episode
Resources	The collaborators found time to meet outside of the regular school day.
	The school librarian led and initiated the collaboration.

The collaboration explored in primary study 2 (Koeberl 2019) occurred at a middle school between a preservice school librarian, a history teacher, and a supervising school librarian (see table 5). The collaboration was informal, and the teacher and preservice librarian worked together to redesign a lesson with the shared vision of engaging students. The teaching strategy selected was to incorporate picture books into an existing lesson on Egypt. The findings indicated that the strategy was successful in that students showed more estimated and increased discussion and time on task. The preservice school librarian liaised between the school librarian and the history teacher, and curated resources from several libraries to use during the collaboration.

Table 5. An inventory of critical episodes during the collaboration in primary study 2: middle school (Koeberl 2019).

Factors	Critical Episode
Environment	The school did not have a history of collaboration.
	The teacher had never collaborated with a school librarian before.
	The principal approved the study.
Membership Characteristics	Both educators in the collaboration were highly experienced in

The collaboration involved in primary study 3 (Donahay 2019) occurred between a school librarian and ELL teacher at a high school (see table 6). The collabo

impact of collaboration on job satisfaction for teachers and school librarians should be conducted to understand this aspect of collaborating.

Works Cited

Alliance for Excellent Education. 2015. "Collaborative Leadership." <https://dashboard.futurereadyschools.org/framework/empowered-innovative-leadership> (accessed May 28, 2020).

American Association of School Librarians. 2018. *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School* Libraries. Chicago: American Library Association.

Bondy, Elizabeth, and Mary T. Brownell. 1997. "Overcoming Barriers to Collaboration Among Partners-in-Teaching." *Intervention in School and Clinic* 33 (2): 112–15.

Church, Audrey. 2010. "Secondary School Principals' Perceptions of the School Librarian's Instructional Role." *School Library Media Research* 13. <www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslpubsandjournals/slr/vol13/SLR_SecondarySchool_V13.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2021).

Glaser, John. 2004. *Leading through Collaboration: Guiding Groups to Productive Solutions*
    Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Haycock, Ken. 2007. "Collaboration: Critical Succes.599 r1(ough)] 1 Tf [(L)-4(e)4(adii-13(ol)-2(Tj [(C)-3

van Deusen, Jean Donham, and Julie I. Tallman. 1994. "The Impact of Scheduling on Curriculum Consultation and Information Skills Instruction: Part One: The 1993–94 AASL/Highsmith Research Award Study." *School Library Media Quarterly* 23 (1): 17–25.

Vangrieken, K8ranggr.361(t)-. 20n. 1h ReTJ /Te8raXculon S-3(ebe)4(8)-10(I)-2(scn /TT1 1 Tf 0.0 1 2