

## Challenges to Collaboration

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Teacher-librarians have long recognized the importance of collaboration as a key component of successful school library programs. A recent study conducted by Queen's University and People for Education that examined exemplary school libraries (Klinger, 2009, click on Articles for an article summarizing this report) confirmed collaborative teaching as a critical activity within Level 3 programs, according to the Exemplary School Library

Program Continuum (Klinger, 2009). Moreover, research has consistently shown that in schools where the teacher-librarian and the classroom teacher collaborate to design, teach, and assess learning experiences, test scores are consistently higher (Lance, 2005). Yet, we all know that effective means of teacher partnering remain elusive. So, what are the persistent challenges and what can be done to overcome them?

### CHALLENGES TO COLLABORATION

#### **Time barrier**

#### **Limited vision of library program**

### CHALLENGE BUSTERS!

#### **Creative scheduling**

- Block timetabling presents opportunities for joint planning that can include the teacher-librarian.
- A flexible, open library timetable promotes collaborative teaching that deepens student learning.
- Joint assessment of student learning saves time.
- Openness to impromptu meetings in the hall or lunchroom provides opportunities to gather information and seek opportunities to assist with teaching.

#### **Reaching beyond the norm**

- Consider partnering for subjects like drama, art and music.
- Assist with planning field trips related to learning topics.
- Arrange visits from community members, politicians, and businesses to bring relevance to student learning.
- Offer to trouble-shoot or help make-over assignments lacking pizzazz!
- Use creative methods to display student work; convert the library into an art gallery or museum.
- Assist students in using technology to showcase their learning.

### **Pressure to cover the curriculum and/or be ready for standardized tests**

### **Differing teacher planning and teaching styles**

(Zmada, 2009)

### **Mounting pressures posed by increased preparation time**

(Klinger, 2009)

(The greater the amount of prep coverage delivered by teacher-librarians, the more restraints there are on instructional collaboration with teachers.)

### **Sharing the load**

- Co-construct assessment strategies with teachers and students.
- Assist with collection of formative assessment data.
- Reflect together on and assess student successes and challenges.
- Plan for multiple collaborations as part of evidencebased practice.
- Model effective teaching practices that incorporate cross-curricular themes.
- Offer to coach and model best practices for new teachers.

### **Flexibility**

- Be open to different “ways” of partnering.
- Observe each other teach and offer constructive critical feedback.
- Capitalize on each other’s strengths to provide a richer, more-rounded program for students.

### **Advocacy**

- Strive to engender a culture of collaboration within the school.
- Promote the library as the hub of the school where teaching and learning are front and centre.
- Develop a learner-centered mission statement that aligns with the school success plan to help establish the role of the library within the context of the wholeschool.
- Keep abreast of research that examines the negative correlation between teacher-librarian prep time coverage and student success— make this available to administrators and teaching staff.
- Communicate with administrators about the learning-centered activities that happen in the library – make this official by means of memo or newsletter.
- Create a library website to advertise events and activities happening @Your Library.
- Be aware of advocacy associations like OLA, OSLA, TALCO, CASL, etc.; visit [www.accessola.com](http://www.accessola.com) for more information.

### **Collaboration: A final word...**

School libraries DO make a difference! However, in order to remain relevant, the role of libraries must inevitably evolve with the changing needs of the communities they serve. Effective collaboration is a natural way for teacher-librarians to remain connected to their learning communities for the enhancement of student achievement and promotion of school success overall.

### **References**

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