Collaboration Between School and Public Librarians:

A Reflective Paper

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Collaboration is one of the cornerstones of 21st century school librarianship (Resh, Greene & Matthew, 2009). Through collaboration with teachers and staff, the school library media specialist ensures that students are receiving an education that meets high standards. Collaboration is typically thought of as something that happens within the walls of the school; however, collaboration with children and young adult librarians in the public library setting is also essential for optimum student learning.

Research shows that over summer break students can lose gains made in reading proficiency (Wepking, 2009). Research also indicates that for children to build an interest in recreational reading they need to have access to a large range of reading choices, be encouraged by adults to read and have substantial time to develop their interests (DeGroot & Branch, 2009). As is indicated in this research, the learning that is required to build reading skill is best achieved when it expands beyond the school day.

Inherently, public libraries lend themself to partnering and collaborating with school libraries. At their core, public libraries are, “educational support centers,” with vast resources that students can benefit from accessing both to support academic and recreational needs (Clay, 2009, p.13). Ensuring that students are having needs met both in school or during school breaks requires collaboration between both sets of professionals.

Successful collaborative partnerships can be built when public and school libraries have a shared vision that values both the needs of the students and the community for equal access (Jones & Diaz, 2009). With a shared vision in place, collaborations thrive when librarians work together to plan appropriately, continually assess the partnership, and commit to success (Clay, 2009). Through developing a
mutually beneficial partnership, both the school library and the public library can enhance their programs through improved access and circulation and enhanced collections and curriculums (Jones & Diaz, 2009). Libraries can benefit through pooling money for databases, expanded programs or special events that otherwise could not be afforded (DelGuidice, 2009; Resh, Greene & Matthew, 2009).

Throughout the literature there are examples of the successes that have come from collaboration. A partnership between the elementary school library and the public library in Heathsville, Virginia, yielded a successful citywide family reading programs and a homework help initiative that lead to higher reading test scores (Bates & Webster, 2009). In Frisco, Texas, out of collaboration came an oral traditions festival that benefited both the community and students, who developed a deeper understanding of the benefits of storytelling and family history (Jones & Diaz, 2009). That same collaboration built on their success to create a program that gives a book to every child born in the county to ensure the child has access to books in their home (Jones & Diaz, 2009). Programs have collaboratively built public libraries on the campuses of schools and developed reading competitions that reward participation (Pelman, 2009). Still others have developed parent presentations, library card drives, traveling book collections and joint school and public library curriculums and assignment (DelGuidice, 2009; Wepking, 2009; DeGroot & Branch, 2009).

Despite the many benefits and success stories of school and public library collaboration, there are still barriers that can be faced in building a collaborative partnership. Research has noted some of the main barriers are difficulty keeping open lines of communication, not being able to imagine the benefits of collaboration and lack
of understanding about each others unique role (DeGroot & Branch, 2009; Wepking, 2009). Other studies discussed barriers that came from inadequate staffing and resources (Fitzgibbons, 2001). Barriers can also be as simple as not knowing whom your counterpart is in the local school or public library (Wepking, 2009).

When obstacles stand in the way of collaboration, there are things that can be done to begin to build a collaborative partnership. One key understanding that can bring librarians together is that collaboration between libraries is designed to support services not take the place of them (Fitzgibbons, 2001). Begin to build a collaborative relationship by identifying staff and meeting to determine the “common purpose” while keeping “communication, cooperation and respect” in mind (Katz, 2009, p. 28-9). Both partiers must understand that, “true partnership is built over a longer investment of time and with a commitment from a variety of key players who keep the focus on continued collaboration” (Resh, Green & Matthew, 2009, p.5). At the start of the relationship, it is important to keep things simple and easy to maintain, especially when there are perceived staffing and resource barriers (Pelman, 2009). Building a collaborative partnership can be as simple as inviting each other to trainings and inservices, linking websites, sharing resources such as book list and pathfinders, alerting each other about assignments and programs and promoting each others services (MacDonald, 2007). From there, the possibilities are endless.

As a Maters of library sciences student, my hope is to pursue a career as a children or young adult librarian. It is my hope to build partnerships in the community to best serve the needs of my patrons. To best serve the needs of students, I believe that despite the barriers I may encounter, it is my responsibility to build partnerships and
collaboration with librarians and educators in the local learning community. Through studying this topic, I have gained a passion and desire to collaborate with school library media specialist. I have also gained a wealth of information about how to build partnerships and exciting ideas for collaborative projects. While the information that I found will serve to help me as I develop partnerships, it was primarily gained through reading short best practices articles. It is my hope as I continue in this field to expand our understanding of collaboration by adding to the scope of information more research that is both qualitative and quantitative in hopes that evidence based practice will allow fewer librarians to encounter barriers and more productive collaborations will be formed.
Reference


Pelman, A. (2009). It takes two: school and public libraries, partnerships that can work!. *Young Adult Library Services, 8*(1), 26-8.

Resh, S., Greene, R., & Matthew, G. (2009). Making connections @ the library:
celebrating collaborations between the school and the public library. Learn Media, 37(3), 5-6.


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- This paper is entirely my own work.
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