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Librarians are in the unique position to affect the learning of every student in a school. Collaborating with teachers is the best way to use the librarian's skills to their fullest, produce a productive teaching team and bring excitement to the learning process. When the librarian and teachers collaborate, the students, teachers and entire school community benefit. "No individual in a school environment exists or operates in a vacuum" (McGregor 200). McGregor goes on the explain how to approach reluctant teachers and gradually change the climate of the school, especially the teachers, to one that understands the many benefits of collaborative teaching between the librarian and the classroom teacher. Moreillon tells us that as librarians, when we are, “...serving as recreational reading motivators and nurturers [it] is not enough (Moreillon 3). The school librarian must work with the entire school team to support student success.

Students have the most to gain from a successful collaboration between the school librarian and teachers. According to Peg, a Kindergarten teacher, “Kids get a lot more individualized attention because they are working with two teachers instead of one." (Kindergarten Teacher). This extra attention is beneficial to the teacher trying to differentiate instruction and to the student who may need a bit more help. The school librarian is able to teach information literacy skills that the teacher may not be proficient in and incorporate those skills into the core curriculum that the classroom teacher is teaching.  Resources available in the library can be incorporated into lessons to enhance them, add more depth and complexity and to aid with differentiation. With additional resources, the teacher librarian is able to inject fun, new ideas into a lesson. Students learn better when they are actively engaged in the lesson. According to Church, “When library media specialists take an active role in instruction, student achievement, as measured by standardized test scores, increases. Students benefit when library media specialists function as teachers and co-teachers, and libraries should be an integral part of the instructional program of the school " (Church 4).  Another benefit of collaboration between the teacher and school librarian, according to a testimonial from a third grade teacher, is that students learn how to, “find the answers to their questions” (3rd-Grade Teacher).  The testimonial continued to explain how much the students benefited from not only two teachers, but from the skills that the school librarian reinforced through her parts of the lesson. Additional testimonials from a high school English teacher confirm the benefits.  Our collaboration, "can result in some really great projects for the kids" (High School English Teacher).

Collaboration benefits teachers in many ways. With the help of the school librarian, teachers can plan and implement interesting and dynamic lessons. According to Kelly, a high school student teacher, she and the librarian, “worked together on developing guidelines for the project, [therefore], the overall project was much more successful with her help ... and I think the students really enjoyed it" (High School Student Teacher). Two minds working together create an atmosphere where ideas can be bounced off of each other resulting in more complete lesson plans that incorporate multiple resources.  Teachers also have the opportunity to learn new skills from the librarian and then use those skills with the students. The librarian can share new resources and technology with the teachers. A kindergarten teacher stated in a testimonial that, "Kids get a lot more individualized attention because they are working with two teachers instead of one. We get lots more ideas because we feed off of each other" (Kindergarten Teacher ). Collaboration is not an easy process, however.  McGregor points out that change is difficult for teachers to accept, so if they have never collaborated before, it may be difficult to get them to see the benefits of it. The librarian must show the teachers what collaboration can do for them. According to Kimmel, teachers put a higher value on individual planning time over collaborative planning time. Kimmel notes that the librarian is instrumental in helping the teachers make connections between their lessons and other topics and resources. With patience and understanding, the librarian can collaborate with the teachers on in-depth projects. A testimonial from a high school art teacher stated that, “The teacher librarian helped more fully integrate research and the writing process into my course” (High School Art Teacher).

The principal is charged with ensuring the success of every child in the school. As a result, they need every person in the school working towards that success. Paula, an elementary school principal, in talking about the librarian, states that "There is no one else who impacts the academic achievement of every single child in the building” (Elementary Principal). The principal can see the whole picture of the school, and also plays a key role in how the teachers accept the school librarian and the role that she plays with the staff and students. Montiel-Overall did a study starting in 2008 focusing on professional development opportunities for elementary school teachers and school librarians’ collaboration along with merging subject and library content. At the end of the first year of the study, the findings indicated that, “One way to encourage effective collaboration is to provide professional development on what it means for teachers and school librarians to collaborate, and to improve knowledge of and desire for collaborative partnerships between teachers and school librarians” (Montiel-Overall 17).  The principal can play a critical part by providing professional development time for teachers and school librarians.

The librarian can enter into a collaborative arrangement with teachers and supply a different perspective with new ideas and resources. They give teachers another classroom in which students can learn. In order to make these collaborations successful, librarians need to project themselves as leaders. According to Haycock, a leader is someone who can rally the troops to do something they do not normally do. Since most teachers do not know that the librarian can collaborate on lesson planning with them, librarians must be the one to initiate the discussion and the principal needs to assist with the climate of the school and with portraying the expected role of the school librarian in the classroom. "The teacher librarian interested in creating a climate in which collaboration takes place must be prepared to take the lead, since anecdotal evidence shows that the teacher librarian who waits for someone else to lead is not included in most collaborations" (McGregor 202). They must be sensitive to the reality that many teachers will not jump on board right away. The librarian also must respect the teachers’ time and understand that while not every teacher may collaborate, the librarian can start with one or two teachers, and gradually increase the number who are willing to collaborate.

Kim’s Reflection: As we learn in many courses about the importance of collaboration, my biggest question has always been: "What does it look like?" because I have never done or seen true collaboration. Kimmel's study focused on the discussions that take place in planning. I felt this was very instructive because that is where my biggest question is. I am still left to wonder: How do I fit this level of collaborative planning into my day? How do I get teachers to see that this amount of collaborative planning time will benefit their students in the end? I found it interesting that Church's study showed so clearly that principals may not actually understand the scope of what our job can be. I understand that I will have to be very proactive in seeking out collaboration with teachers because they may not understand either, what I can do for them. Since I am not currently working full time in a school, it will remain to be seen what type of atmosphere I will be working in when I get a library job. Because most principals learn what my job as a librarian is all about from watching me do my job, I will have to be vocal about what I am doing and show the school community examples of the collaborative lessons I teach. So, the burning question is: Can I do it??

Cindee’s Reflection:  At the beginning of this course, I had a brief understanding of collaboration between a school librarian and a teacher, but I still had some questions and unclear thoughts.  The first reading I connected with was McGregor’s comment that, "No individual in a school environment exists or operates in a vacuum" (McGregor 200).   After reading the rest of McGregor’s article, I began to feel encouraged that if I can gradually change the climate of the teaching staff, including the principal, then I may be able to move into a more collaborative role at the school.  The testimonials confirmed my understanding about the benefits of collaboration.  The art teachers comment that, “the teacher librarian helped more fully integrate research and the writing process into my course” (High School Art Teacher). I am convinced of the benefits of collaboration and I understand how to go about gradually getting teachers to be on board with me.

I now understand that it is up to me to “sell” myself to the principal and to the teachers through research and studies that confirm the benefits for all stakeholders when there is collaboration.   Once I get that one teacher on board, I can use the success from that collaborative lesson, to show other teachers and/or the principal the benefits gained for all. My remaining questions are: “Who runs the library for normal checking in and out while the librarian is collaborating in another room, and how does the school librarian teach the essential skills learned in the library when she is collaborating with teachers?”

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