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Teachers + School Librarians = Student Achievement: When Will We Believe It?

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TEACHERS + SCHOOL LIBRARIANS = STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:
WHEN WILL WE BELIEVE IT?

By

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Bachelor of Arts - English
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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Department Teaching and Learning
College of Education
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ABSTRACT

Teachers + School Librarians = Student Achievement:
When Will We Believe It?

by

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School librarians, teachers, and administrators have understood that student achievement can be enhanced when teachers and librarians collaborate. Most of the scholarly literature concerning teacher-school librarian collaboration has been written by school librarians rather than teachers and administrators. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to describe the concept of teacher-librarian collaboration from the perspectives of school librarians. Content analysis of 37 responses to a school librarians' online discussion board revealed the barriers to and some of the supports for collaboration.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Some 60 studies have shown a relationship between student achievement, school libraries, and school librarians (Scholastic, 2008). Specifically, these studies have suggested that student achievement improves when teachers and librarians collaborate (Hulen, 2004; Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2000; Lance, Rodney, & Russell, 2007; Scholastic, 2008; Shayne, 2001). Cooper and Bray (2011) wrote about the characteristics, challenges, and opportunities of librarians and teachers collaborating. Specifically, Cooper and Bray emphasized the librarian's role as instructional partner, which was one of four "key roles of the school library media specialist – teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator" (p. 48). School librarians have encountered several obstacles to collaborating, however (Buzzeo, 2015).

Purpose

The purpose of this narrative thesis was to describe obstacles and supports for librarian-teacher collaboration from the perspective of school librarians in elementary, middle, and high schools. In this thesis study, the term *teacher and librarian collaboration* was defined using Montiel-Overall's (2007) concept: "an instructional strategy that positively affects student academic achievement" (p. 277). *Librarian* and *library media specialist* were defined as a K-12 school librarian who develops programs linking all content areas of the curriculum and encourages partnerships and collaboration with teachers in their schools. Although studies have shown a relationship between student achievement and teacher-librarian collaboration, school librarians posting to social media have expressed frustration with the barriers. To further describe the barriers, Data were collected from 37 anonymous, online responses of K-12 school librarians

who had posted to an electronic mailing list service for school librarians. Findings from the content analysis of the data may have practical implications for school librarians and teachers as well as theoretical significance for librarian and teacher educators interested in collaboration.

Collaboration

Several librarian-focused organizations, publications, and websites have offered techniques for librarians to collaborate with teachers. School librarians have also been advised to gather student achievement data specific to their schools and their school libraries to encourage collaboration (Zmuda, 2006). To meet the objective of elevating students to full membership in learning communities, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) has conceptualized collaboration as one of three elements for building partnerships for learning (1998); the other two elements were leadership and technology (21st century learning highlights). Encouraging collaboration, Goodreads (2009)—a social networking site about books and book reviews—has sponsored space for education-related discussions where librarians, teachers, and students talked about book-related projects occurring at their schools.

Using social media in the same manner as Goodreads (2009) has been described as a beneficial tool that librarians should share with teachers for the benefit of their students (Barseghian, 2011; Cooper and Bray, 2011) and as a method to encourage more librarian-teacher collaboration (Immroth & Lukenbill, 2007). In one public media blog, Barseghian (2011) talked about students collaborating with each other through social media “to learn more about specific subjects, to test out ideas and theories, to learn facts, and to gauge each other’s opinions” (p. 1). The writer referenced these Web 2.0 activities as teaching educators (teachers and librarians) to respectfully interact.

Illustrating Barseghian's (2011) premise, a high school freshman's commentary noted that teachers should consider using social media given its appeal to students (Benmar, 2015). The commentator described that only one out of her six teachers used a smartboard, and that particular teacher engaged his students' attention by showing his thinking on the smartboard. Benmar (2015) also found writing a book report online and the shared discussions caused her to understand the book better because she listened and responded to other people's opinions that were backed up with evidence. Librarians and teachers using this social media for collaboration might similarly benefit.

Cooper and Bray (2011) admonished school librarians as follows:

It is an understatement to say that these are challenging times for schools, and for school library media programs. School library media specialists need to demonstrate, perhaps now more than at any time in the history of the profession, that the work they do is meaningful, relevant, having a positive impact on instructional programs and, ultimately, on student achievement." (pp. 53 & 54.)

Much is being done to show that collaboration works, but apparently not enough collaboration is occurring. This paper attempts to show collaboration between classroom teachers and school librarians from the librarians' viewpoint.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews collaboration literature within the domain of academic library science. Most of the peer-reviewed literature concerning librarian-teacher collaboration has appeared in the domain of library information and science (LIS) rather than education (Latham, Gross, & Witte, 2013). Concepts related to collaboration include student achievement, characteristics of libraries and librarians, and attitudes. No consensus definitions were evident for the concept of student achievement. This review also discusses practitioner commentaries from association publications and online blogs.

Peer-Reviewed, Empirical Studies

Library Program and Librarian Effects on Student Achievement

School library effects. Smith (as cited by Lasitch, 2003) investigated the effects of school libraries on student achievement and the characteristics of library programs and staff. Six hundred school libraries in Texas were randomly selected and more than 200 variables were collected for analysis. Comparing student progress in settings with and without libraries, Smith found that 10% more students met minimum expectations in reading compared to students in schools without libraries. Libraries were more important than the effects of other school variables on achievement. Comparing top and low-performing elementary schools, he found the 25 highest performing schools were more developed, staff spent 33% more time co-teaching and helping teachers find and use online materials, and staff spent 3-9% more time participating in committees and meeting with colleagues.

A second study of school library effects analyzed the responses concerning 440 (out of 924) school libraries regarding the relationship between library programs and state testing results

(Lance, Rodney, & Russell, 2007). Librarians responded to questions about library hours, staffing levels, collection size, networked technology, and usage and funding. The results showed that “across grade levels, schools tended to perform better on the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus test where there were better-staffed, better stocked, and better-funded school library programs” (Lance et al., 2007, para. 3). The Indiana Study researchers considered the influences of poverty, race, and ethnicity, then concluded that school libraries equalized students’ opportunities for learning and achievement.

Collaboration Characteristics and Effects on Student Achievement

Characteristics. Studies of teacher-librarian collaboration have examined barriers and supports, which included attitudes, roles, and schedules. Montiel-Overall (2007) studied the characteristics of successful collaboration between teachers and librarians “because there is little hard research that defines specific practices that lead to successful collaborations” (p. 277). The definition used for teacher and librarian collaboration was “an instructional strategy that positively affects student academic achievement” (p. 277). The two models of teacher and librarian collaboration used were the Loertscher Taxonomy and the Teacher and Librarian Collaboration (TLC) model. The Loertscher Taxonomy that described levels of involvement between teachers and librarians. Montiel-Overall’s TLC model presented collaboration as four elements: “coordination, cooperation, integrated instruction, and integrated curriculum” (Montiel-Overall, 2007, p. 278). For measurement, coordination and cooperation were at the lower end of collaboration; integrated instruction and integrated curriculum were at the higher end. Both theories “suggest that collaboration involves multiple ways in which participants engage in dialogue, planning, and problem solving” (Montiel-Overall, 2007, p. 280). The literature review for this study had revealed a wide range of professional working relationships

involving shared resources; improved flow of activities; divided responsibilities; co-planning, co-implementation, and co-evaluation; partnerships in planning and teaching; improved delivery of content; and shared thinking, shared planning, and shared creation of something new.

Participants in the Montiel-Overall (2007) study included 64 teachers, seven librarians, six principals, and one vice principal from seven K-8 public schools who completed two written surveys. Additionally, “eighteen participants from three schools also participated in a qualitative study, which involved interviews, observations, and a focused group workshop” (p. 281). All participants were minimally compensated. All participants were experienced in collaborating in school settings. This study was considered preliminary, but the results suggested “that high-end or ‘true collaboration’ involving greater interaction and shared thinking, planning, and creation of innovative instruction appears to be well understood among the study participants” (p. 288). These results were consistent with previous studies that indicated collaboration works. The researcher stated that “development of a valid, reliable instrument to assess teacher and librarian collaboration would be an important contribution to school librarianship in future research,” drawing attention to ways librarians work successfully with teachers to improve student academic achievement (p. 289).

A second study of characteristics aimed to identify and predict the personal and institutional factors supporting collaboration (Immroth & Lukenbill, 2007). Researchers compared a group of student teacher-librarian collaborations using social marketing tools to focus group collaborations with experienced teachers. Although teachers in both groups supported collaboration, time constraints limited the extent of the collaborations. The study was considered exploratory due to bureaucratic constraints at the university where the research was based, limited access at one of the schools, and the small number of participants in the test

groups. Nonetheless, the authors concluded that social marketing techniques could foster collaboration activities.

In a third study of characteristics, Montiel-Overall (2008) examined settings in which high-end collaboration occurred between teachers and school librarians. Using a qualitative perspective, she analyzed the characteristics and attributes of schools in which high-end collaboration occurred. High-end collaboration was defined as collaborative practices between teachers and librarians in which library curriculum, instruction in information literacy, and subject content were fully integrated. Specifically, Montiel-Overall explored how these participants defined collaboration, how they described the process and the activities within the process, how they managed time, and which factors enabled or inhibited collaboration. Teachers thought true collaboration had positive results for students, but these same teachers admitted that they rarely participated in collaboration, mostly because of what they felt was a lack of time.

In the Montiel-Overall's (2008) study, 18 teachers and librarians were chosen from three public schools and recommended by a volunteer "consultant" from one of the schools. The chosen participants were active collaborators. Semi-structured interviews, semi-structured observations, and field notes were used to collect data. The researcher suggested that high-end teacher and librarian collaboration was supported in school cultures in which

- (1) at least one individual was deeply committed to the power of working with others and became a catalyst of collaboration,
- (2) multiple facets of collaboration occurred within collaborative endeavors,
- (3) worthwhile goals such as improving teaching and learning became the primary purpose of high-end collaborators,
- (4) collaboration was an iterative process that built on early successes, and
- (5) barriers such as lack of time could be overcome (Montiel-Overall, 2008).

Montiel-Overall gave as a strong argument against time being a barrier to collaboration by stating that time issues could be resolved when collaboration was highly valued.

Achievement. Loetscher (2014) studied school libraries, school librarians, and their impact on student achievement at both the elementary and secondary school levels. In his study of teachers and librarians coteaching, the research question was “Could a measure be developed and easily replicated in any school to provide more avenues to measure success rather than relying solely on standardized testing?” (Loetscher, 2014, p. 9). Loetscher thought if such an option existed, more teachers might consider collaborating with their school librarians. For his research, a call went out for volunteers, and 16 schools across the United States responded. Data were gathered via a short questionnaire prepared by the researchers and distributed by school librarians to five to ten teachers who taught alone in their classrooms. The teachers were asked to evaluate how successful their students were in meeting or exceeding the teachers’ highest expectations for a learning experience. In phase II, the teacher librarians asked one or two teachers with whom they had cotaught how successful their students were in meeting or exceeding the teachers’ expectations. Phase II showed a 20 to 50% increase in the success rate over that in phase I. Interestingly, when the phase II teachers were asked to comment about the success their students experienced when the teachers taught in isolation, one said that technology integrators and librarians were nearly always involved. Loetscher concluded this method worked well and could be extended to include coteaching with other specialists.

Goddard (as cited in McClure, 2008) noted a “paucity of research investigating the extent to which teachers’ collaborative school improvement practices are related to student achievement” (McClure, 2008, pp. 82-83). Goddard surveyed 452 teachers in 47 elementary schools and used reading and math achievement scores for 2,536 fourth graders. The researchers found a positive relationship between teacher collaboration and differences among schools in

math and reading achievement. Goddard and her research colleagues said further studies were needed.

Attitudes. A 2006 survey (as cited by Lance et al., 2007) of 293 school librarians, 99 principals, and 422 teachers investigated staff attitudes about teacher-librarian collaboration: how these educators learned about each other, what they wanted most from each other professionally, how much their educational activities were valued by each other, and how their collaborations influenced the assessment of Indiana's information literacy standards. Results showed that 52% of the teachers valued collaboration, 57% of school librarians valued collaboration, and 99% of principals valued collaboration. Based on these results, the Association for Indiana Media Educators set three-month, six-month, and one-year goals to assist media programs across the state "to advocate for the structures and resources necessary to achieve the vision so that students are able to accomplish established goals articulated in the mission statements at the state and local levels" (Lance et al., 2007, Next steps, Para. 5).

Harvey (2010) investigated collaboration between himself, as the school librarian, and four teachers at his school. He interviewed two fourth grade teachers, the music teacher, and a first grade teacher. Eight questions focused on why they began working with him, how the planning worked between them, what kind of time advice they had for teachers who did not collaborate with their school librarians, and how students benefitted from the collaborations. Harvey concluded the following:

The role we school librarians play in instruction is huge. We bring with us the *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* from AASL. We bring with us knowledge of technology tools and their applications. The teachers bring with them the curriculum. When we combine all that together, powerful things happen for students! (p. 4)

These teachers were impressed with Harvey's offers to help them with their planning, with his knowledge of their curriculum, willingness to aid them in using new technologies, readiness to

attend their grade-level planning sessions, ability to communicate in multiple ways, and overall preparation.

Focusing on educating student teachers and student librarians, Latham, Gross, and Witte (2013) compared the views of library and education faculty toward preparing their students to collaborate while on the job. The exploratory research project involving library and information studies (LIS) faculty and education faculty. They found that education faculty believed that education and LIS had overlapping concerns, but collaboration was discussed more often in LIS classes than in education classes. Faculty from both disciplines agreed that collaboration was desirable but often difficult to achieve. “Considerably more attention is given to teacher-librarian collaboration in LIS literature than in education literature” (Latham et al., 2013, p. 2).

When the United Federation of Teachers circulated their 2013-2014 annual teacher survey to 2,510 randomly selected New York City public school teachers, 33% responded. The results showed that 69% of K-8 teachers, 69% of middle school teachers, and 74% of high school teachers felt their students needed more library time.

Practice-Related Commentary

The chair of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (Fitzsimmons as cited in Scholastic, 2008) stated support for state certified school librarians given the contribution of school libraries to student learning outcomes: “From our perspective, a critical part of the comprehensive and renewed strategy to ensure that students learn to read and are effective users of information and ideas is the requirement that every school have a school library and that school libraries be staffed by highly qualified, state certified school library media specialists” (as cited in Scholastic, 2008, p. 2). Also noted was bipartisan legislation, Strengthening Kids’ Interest in Learning and Libraries (SKILLS Act), that supported librarian-

teacher collaboration. Johnson (as cited by Cooper & Bray, 2011) cautioned, however, that collaboration was not the goal but the means to achieve a goal.

Cooper and Bray (2011) suggested that librarians begin the collaboration process with a couple of teachers in pilot programs visible to the other teachers who could see the results in improved student achievement. “Word of the successful library media specialist-teacher teamwork will spread naturally” (p. 49). The researchers expected the collaboration process would mature as the participants gained trust and respect for each other. Furthermore, they agreed with Harvey (2010) that librarians should become familiar with teachers’ standards. For example, Lance (as cited by Cooper & Bray, 2011) pointed out that “far too many people who now work as administrators and teachers never experienced the sort of school library program the profession advocates today” (p. 49). Cooper and Bray agreed with Lance’s theory that school librarians were responsible for their teacher colleagues’ understanding and embracing of the librarian’s role

Summary

Montiel-Overall (2010) noted that very little attention has been given in the education literature to the issue of teacher-librarian collaboration. She has argued that teachers have a fundamental lack of understanding of the potential that collaboration could play in integrating skills instruction into the curriculum. Latham et al. (2013) found faculty from both LIS and education programs had very little experience of their own in collaborating with teachers and librarians before they migrated to educating those pre-professionals: “Teacher-librarian collaboration had been nonexistent in their experience or had been, at best, challenging to accomplish” (p. 10). Also noted by faculty in both programs was the issue of territoriality. In addition, most faculty in these programs did not even see school libraries as resource centers,

“but rather as extra space where student detentions or faculty meetings could be held” (p. 10).

This view has been aided by almost no literature in education journals focusing on teacher-librarian collaboration. Consequently, this study aimed to describe how teacher-librarian collaboration had been hindered or supported from the perspective of school librarians.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Question and Research Design

This descriptive thesis study addressed the question, what are the obstacles and supports for teacher-librarian collaboration? Document data were collected from a K-12 school librarians' online discussion about teacher-librarian collaboration (see Appendix C). I used inductive analysis to categorize the responses and added theoretical, deductive coding to identify the patterns among categories.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Only anonymous, online document data were collected and analyzed, so I did not use a participant sampling plan, recruitment plan, or consenting process. The data were collected from an online discussion for school librarians that took place over three consecutive days in March, 2015. Of the 37 responses I collected, seven were posted the first day and concerned self-advocacy, 21 were posted the second day and concerned roadblocks to collaboration, and eight were posted the third day and concerned how administrators had supported or hindered collaboration. The librarians worked with students at all levels of K-12 education. Over half of the respondents, however, worked in elementary schools. No information about gender, age, location, or school characteristics was available.

Data analysis proceeded with an inductive approach to describe the data. After reading the responses line-by-line, a descriptive code was attached to a unit of the text. These codes were then rank ordered by frequency. Analysis of relationships between the categories led to the key findings discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS

A total of 37 responses collected from school librarians described the roadblocks, administrator supports, and self-advocacy techniques related to librarian-teacher collaboration in K-12 education. Using an inductive approach, I first described units of the data after line-by-line reading. The following categories were found: meetings, fixed schedule, lack of designated school time, territorial librarians, territorial teachers, skeptics, meetings, e-mail, presentations, materials, social media, and persuasion. These categories were reduced to time and attitudes for barriers and to communication and persuasion for supports.

Table 1 *Coding Scheme*

Barriers	
Time	Meetings Fixed schedule Lack of designated school time
Attitudes	Territorial Skeptical
Supports	
Communications	Meetings E-mail Presentations Customized materials
Persuasion	Social marketing strategies Social media Directed to teachers Directed to administrators

The most frequent and most detailed responses concerned the roadblocks to collaboration. Two key barriers were time and attitudes. Time issues were the most frequently reported barrier and included lack of time for meetings, inflexible schedules, and lack of designated school time for meetings. Attitudes concerned professional territoriality and skepticism.

The support responses described how some librarians had addressed the barriers to collaboration. The two key supports were communication and persuasion. Communications was usually initiated by the librarian and included written, online, and face-to-face interactions. Persuasion could be directed to the teacher or principal and used social media marketing strategies.

Although lack of time was almost universal as an obstacle for teacher-librarian collaboration, several responses described successes in overcoming schedules and demands. Communication and persuasion were mentioned most often as self-advocacy techniques that were supportive. A supportive principal or teacher seemed to be one the librarian had developed through consistent communication and effective programs.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Given that teachers seldom initiate collaborations with librarians yet understand that librarians could help their students' academic achievement, the question guiding this study was what are the obstacles and supports for teacher-librarian collaboration? Although the study was exploratory, both obstacles and supports were clearly articulated by the librarians who participated in the online discussion. Findings may also have practical significance for K-12 educators and theoretical significance for library science and education researchers interested in collaboration.

Limitations and Future Research

This study examined only the school librarian perspective. Future studies could investigate similar questions from teacher and principal perspectives. The descriptive design of this study was sufficient for describing and exploring the concept of collaboration, but enhanced methodological and interpretive rigor could be incorporated with case study design, participant interviews and observations, and a theoretical framework. Future research should gather evidence that teacher and librarian collaboration is a causal factor for student test scores and student achievement (Montiel-Overall, 2008).

Discussion

Barriers to collaboration included lack of time, lack of librarian inclusion, lack of understanding about librarians' skills, and lack of principal support. Overcoming the barriers required self-advocacy through communicating (meetings, e-mail, materials, presentations), demonstrating competence, and informing the principal about successes and needs. Data from the librarian responses summarized these findings: "Make yourself an important, reliable

resource, invaluable to the students' success, and a respected colleague...willing to help the teacher and the students succeed. After all, we have the best jobs in the world” (Post 37).

I chose to conclude this thesis with an example of possibility. In a Connecticut elementary school and reported by Schott (2015), the library had been remodeled as a learning center for 21st century skills in which librarians and teachers cotaught digital skills. In addition to spaces for reading or studying, the remodeled school library had more common areas for collaborating. A change in the librarian’s schedule allowed for four times as many periods to collaborate with teachers and to see students’ research projects through to the end. Librarian-teacher-administrator cooperation resulted in physical changes and schedule changes that supported increased collaboration and student learning. The learning commons was used and valued by all: the principal, the teachers, the media specialist, the students, and the parents. The new space and programs were made possible by one school librarian who had advocated for a change.

APPENDIX A

VALUE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES: STEPHEN ABRAM'S LIST

The Crisis in Canada's School Libraries: The Case for Reform and Reinvestment

http://www.accessola.com/data/6/rec_docs/ExecSummary_Ha_E1E12.pdf

Recent reports that were not included in the above report include the following

:

School Libraries and Student achievement in Ontario [PDF]

The Ontario Library Association, April 2006

http://www.accessola.com/data/6/rec_docs/137_eqao_pfe_study_2006.pdf

School Libraries Work! [PDF]

Scholastic Research Foundation Paper, 2008 Edition

http://www2.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/s/slw3_2008.pdf

Idaho School Library Impact Study – 2009

<http://libraries.idaho.gov/doc/idaho-school-library-impact-study-2009>

The 2006 report on the impact of Delaware school libraries is available from the Delaware Division of Libraries:

<http://library.blogs.delaware.gov>

Statistical Studies of School and Other Libraries (excellent weblibliography)

<http://www.sldirectory.com/libsf/resf/statistics.html>

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Salem State College – B.A., English (1966)

Teaching and Librarian Experience

Library Technician	Roseman Univ of Health Sciences	(2004-present)
Library Technician	University of Nevada - Las Vegas	(2003-2004)
Cataloger	San Diego Water Authority	(2001-2003)
Assistant Librarian	NewSchool of Architecture	(2001-2003)
Teacher	Dover Learning Center	(1996-2001)

Professional Association Memberships

American Library Association
Nevada Library Association