

Research into Practice. Building Interdisciplinary Partnerships

Article

Collaboration with classroom teachers is an essential component of a school librarian's job. We combine our information literacy and technology integration standards with those of the teacher with whom we're collaborating and put great effort into designing authentic, relevant instruction that can be delivered to students at the exact time it's needed. Collaborating with language arts, science, and social studies teachers is our bread and butter, but connecting with non-core classroom teachers such as music, art, physical education, agriculture, world languages, or family and consumer science should also be considered. A few years ago, I (Lucy) wrote a brief article that described collaboration between librarians and music teachers. Through my efforts to encourage school librarian and music educator partners, I explored research on what makes for a long lasting, rich, collaborative relationship between educators. Here is an excerpt from that article:

Collaboration is partnering with a teacher to 'teach information literacy skills in the context of content area curriculum.' Although it can be difficult to engage in collaboration, we know that collaboration increases when school librarians foster interdisciplinary partnerships by "cultivating a network of willing participants...a better strategy than focusing on a subject area as a strategic group." An interdisciplinary partnership is a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship between two disciplines that addresses a common problem or meets a common set of professional and educational goals. Interdisciplinary partnerships support innovative and creative approaches to problem-solving because these partnerships bring together skills and resources that exist within the domain of different disciplines. By cultivating multiple perspectives, interdisciplinary partners are able to analyze issues and instructional objectives in more depth, increasing the likelihood that programs and/or solutions will be used to benefit a broader student base. (Green 2014)

Dawn Frazier tells us students benefit from teacher-librarian collaboration because they receive more guidance during the research process, access to a wider variety of resources in multiple formats, and instruction in the use of digital tools to show what they've learned (2010). She also notes Keith Curry Lance's research that shows student achievement increases when school librarians are involved in planning and teaching information literacy skills in the context of an academic discipline (2001). I (Michelle) want to have this impact on as many of my students as possible, so it makes sense to cast a wider net when seeking collaboration opportunities with teachers. In Lucy's article, she further describes how library programs also benefit from these relationships, sharing these benefits even further with students through strong advocacy, more thorough curricular alignment, varied collection development, multicultural programming, and broader community and administrative support.

School librarians who are apprehensive about approaching non-core teachers can start small. Library spaces are prime real estate and provide an excellent opportunity to partner with teachers in the areas of music, theater, dance, and visual arts by showcasing student work. Students can display art on your bookshelves and your library can host the performance of short plays, reader's theater, and small-group band, orchestra, or choir concerts (Moorefield-Lang 2011).

You might also consider breaking the ice with a list of resources teachers can provide their students for an upcoming assignment. As you wait in line at the copier or take a break in the teacher's lounge, listen for opportunities where your expertise in finding and accessing information can be of help. While offering space and sharing resources are not the highest level of collaboration possible, they can certainly be a catalyst for a more in-depth partnership in the future, as described by Genevieve Gallagher, a high school librarian from Charlottesville, VA: "One of my greatest successes this year has been with our photography teacher. I began by sharing articles relating to copyright and photography, and created a list of resources for the students. Since the photography teacher is branching out into writing across the curriculum, I shared our Biography in Context database with her when she mentioned that her students were doing a project researching famous photographers. This led to her inviting me into eight different classes to co-teach lessons on both copyright and digital citizenship and on doing research with reliable sources" (Hunt 2012, p. 4).

As you gain experience collaborating with non-core teachers, you'll soon have a better sense of how their individual teaching goals and standards overlap with each other, and you might find you're eager to take on interdisciplinary instructional partnerships. Collaborating with multiple non-core teachers or a combination of core and non-core teachers can be rewarding for all involved. Sydney Minter shows us "good collaboration involves just the right blend of planning, teamwork, and curriculum" as she describes collaboration between a librarian and art, drama, and social studies teachers (2008, 38). The lessons the four teachers created covered standards from each content area and provided an opportunity for students to search for information, write skits, paint scenery, and present a tableau to an audience. An activity such as this "provides learning that covers...multiple intelligences and modalities" (Minter 2008, p. 39). For more ideas on interdisciplinary partnerships, make sure you access Lucy Santos Green's article [here](#).

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