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Collaboration between School and Public Librarians

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Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive study was to analyze and describe the collaborative relationships of teacher librarians and public librarians in one Iowa county. The research focused on how collaborative relationships are established between public and school libraries, what type of collaborations exist, what resources are shared, and what barriers to successful collaboration exist. This was a qualitative study using semistructured interviews with three public youth services librarians in two public libraries and two teacher librarians in two different districts in the same county. The findings included an overall desire to collaborate with other libraries in the area, but difficulty in establishing these relationships due to real or perceived barriers. Informal collaboration occurred in sporadic fashion between public libraries and schools, but not necessarily with the school librarian and mostly consisted of sharing of information about the summer reading program.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOL AND PUBLIC LIBRARIANS

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Division of School Library Studies
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by
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this descriptive study was to analyze and describe the collaborative relationships of teacher librarians and public librarians in one Iowa county. The research focused on how collaborative relationships are established between public and school libraries, what type of collaborations exist, what resources are shared, and what barriers to successful collaboration exist. This was a qualitative study using semistructured interviews with three public youth services librarians in two public libraries and two teacher librarians in two different districts in the same county. The findings included an overall desire to collaborate with other libraries in the area, but difficulty in establishing these relationships due to real or perceived barriers. Informal collaboration occurred in sporadic fashion between public libraries and schools, but not necessarily with the school librarian and mostly consisted of sharing of information about the summer reading program.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“No one can do anything on their own anymore; it’s simply not possible,” Susan Ballard, former president of the American Association of School Librarians remarked regarding the necessity of public library and school library collaboration. In communities across the United States, public and school libraries are coming together to successfully benefit both entities. Whether it is because the partnership supports a grant to help early childhood programs as in Denver, or to get more resources to teachers and students as in New York, collaboration can extend resources and budgets, support student learning, increase program attendance, and much more (Murvosh, 2013).

Problem Statement

Every day, school librarians and public librarians try to do what is best for those they serve, often the same group of people: students. Librarians are frequently expected, as communicated through standards established by state and national authorities, to support the needs of patrons, including youth. However, librarians in both settings often face limited resources. This could mean deficiencies in the types and diversity of their book collections. It could also mean a lack of staff, time, current knowledge on trends and patron needs, and budgetary constraints. To overcome these barriers, librarians and communities are coming together to collaborate, to share resources, and therefore, meet the needs of youth (Murvosh, 2013).

The American Association of School Librarians’ (AASL, 2009) *Empowering Learners* stresses the importance of collaboration in its guidelines. Collaboration should

exist in the school and learning community and “beyond school walls,” which includes collaboration with the community and public libraries (p. 21). Public libraries are also expected to collaborate with local community agencies to support public library standards. In the State Library of Iowa’s (2016) *Public Library Standards* (2016), public libraries are expected to provide or cooperate with other community agencies to provide programming, outreach and to meet the needs of the community. “The library collaborates with other organizations, including agencies that serve special populations, to improve library service” (State Library of Iowa, 2016, p. 21). This includes libraries and schools. Not only are these expectations and standards set forth by state and library organizations, these collaborations have proven to be successful and beneficial for those involved, and many public and school librarians believe that collaboration is important and should be occurring (Smith, Shea, & Wu, 2014).

Collaboration can be beneficial in several ways including sharing knowledge, experience, time, and workers (Reinwald, 2015). Nelson and Ingraham Dwyer (2015) address this issue in their article, *What the Public Librarian Wishes the School Librarian Knew*. Public libraries are open more hours, have free Wi-Fi and computers, and typically have larger and more diverse collections of books, magazines, DVD’s, audio books, and electronic resources than do libraries in schools. If there is a solid foundation of communication between public and school librarians, public librarians can “offer students support through homework help centers, assistance with their assignments, summer reading/learning programs that address the summer slide, after-school informal STEM programs, technology access and education, and more” (p. 27).

Another way collaboration can be beneficial to both public and school libraries is through cross promotion of programs and resources. Nelson and Ingraham Dwyer (2015) emphasize this point, “As community information centers, public libraries can distribute school information to the community at large” and in return the school library can “directly communicate with parents of students to inform them of upcoming programs and services at their public libraries” (p. 27). Digital resources, such as potentially expensive databases and ebooks, can also get more promotion through multiple sources and therefore be used more (Reinwald, 2015).

The expense of digital resources and other non-digital resources combined with dwindling budgets, can force librarians to make tough choices about purchases. This can lead to unmet patron needs. Collaborative resource sharing can potentially help save money for both libraries by pooling resources, efficiently using tax dollars, and removing duplications. And the potential for collaboration in saving money is more than just coordinated materials purchases. Professional development, co-teaching, co-sponsored programming, and public and school library consortiums are just some of the current collaborations taking place in cities across the United States that save libraries and librarians money, staff hours, and time. These collaborations also benefit library patrons by meeting needs through librarian knowledge of current trends and topics and increased access to a wider selection of programming and materials (Murvosh, 2013).

Yet even with the knowledge that collaboration and the sharing of resources could benefit all parties, many libraries still are not collaborating effectively or at all. In a 2012 *School Library Journal* survey, only 30% of those polled “coordinate book purchases to

support the curriculum,” and only 9% work directly together to purchase materials and resources to support the curriculum and homework assignments, yet 34% of public librarians “consider purchasing materials that support homework and the school curriculum” when buying materials (Miller & Girmscheid, 2012, para. 2). Even though public and school librarians believe collaboration should occur, it is not happening in the majority of communities.

According to Murvosh (2013), valid barriers exist for both public and school librarians that include differing viewpoints on how to spend money and use resources, lack of support from administration and superiors, limited time, and the school system’s emphasis on standardized testing. Collaboration may be an extremely difficult process if the public and school librarians do not have common ground upon which to stand or if their viewpoints differ widely. Furthermore, many school administrators are reluctant to support such collaboration unless it is directly proven to positively impact test scores or its purpose is aligned with curriculum (Murvosh, 2013).

Both public and school librarians agree collaboration should occur for a variety of reasons. Yet, it has been shown that significant barriers exist and the majority of librarians are not collaborating across their communities. There is a need for librarians to overcome these barriers and establish positive, effective, collaborative relationships with other librarians that benefit students, educators and library patrons. While Keltner (2014) performed a study on current collaboration and perceptions of collaboration in Cedar County (Iowa), there is a lack of information on current collaborations and perceptions of collaboration across the state of Iowa. This study is focused in another county in Iowa

and will bring the research closer to a more comprehensive understanding of collaboration in Iowa.

Summary of Problem Statement

Many public and school librarians believe it would be best to share resources through collaboration, but this does not often happen in practice because of real or perceived barriers.

Purpose

The purpose of this descriptive study is to analyze and describe the collaborative relationships of teacher librarians and public librarians in one county in Iowa.

Research Questions

1. How are collaborative relationships between the public library and the school librarians established?
2. What type of collaboration exists between the public libraries and school libraries?
3. What, if any, resources are shared between the public libraries and the school libraries?
4. What are the barriers to successful collaboration?

Assumptions and Limitations

One assumption is that there is collaboration occurring, but it could be better or more intentional. This study is limited to the area of one county in Iowa.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this descriptive study is to analyze and describe the collaborative relationships of teacher librarians and public librarians in one county in Iowa. Research related to this study include the topics of resource sharing, perceptions of collaboration among librarians, and student use and perception of libraries and library resources.

Resource Sharing

Smith, Shea, and Wu (2014) focused on the collaborative resource sharing between public and school librarians, specifically on the use of collaborative collection development (CCD) and interlibrary loan (ILL). Smith et al. investigated public librarian opinion on collaboration, how often it occurred and what factors correlated with the ILL and CCD activities of public librarians. This quantitative study was conducted employing an online survey of 265 public librarians serving youth across the United States. Through this survey, Smith et al. discovered that public librarians do believe in the importance of collaboration, yet are not frequently engaging in resource sharing due to lack of common goals, communication, and knowledge of collaboration strategies between public and school librarians. Public librarians may not always see supporting school curriculum as a priority and/or may lack education and professional development in collaborative strategies. The research also found that the public librarians who are more likely to collaboratively share resources tend to have more library experience, understand trends and issues in school libraries, and feel they have knowledge of collaborative strategies.

While Smith, Shea and Wu (2014) studied the potential for modern resource sharing, Garland (1989) provides a view of pre-Internet resource sharing to better understand historical perspectives about libraries and resource sharing. Garland compared the types of resources used at a public library and an elementary school library to see if there could be implications for collaborative resource sharing. Garland wanted to know what type of books circulated in each place (easy fiction, fiction and nonfiction), what type of nonfiction subjects circulate, and if there is a relationship between the highest circulated nonfiction items and the school's curriculum. Garland collected a week's worth of school library circulation data from each of the school's four grading periods and two days worth of circulation data from the public library from the same week. In this correlational study, Garland analyzed the data from the circulation records. Garland found that the collections were being used in different ways, with easy fiction being the resource type most frequently circulated at the public library and nonfiction being the majority of checkouts at the school library. The use of nonfiction seemed to be curriculum oriented at both libraries. Garland felt the implications could lead to cooperative resource sharing and development, particularly in nonfiction to provide diversity and duplications as needed.

In another historical study, Doll (1984) specifically examined school library and public library collections to see what duplication (same title with multiple copies in the same library) and overlap (same title at both public and school libraries) existed to either justify a combined library or support collaboration in the form of interlibrary loan. The study included four Illinois community public libraries and the elementary schools within

those communities. A random sample of 200 titles from each library was drawn and a questionnaire was given to the librarians at each building. Doll found that the average overlap was about 50% when comparing school library collections to public library children's collections. However, the school library had only about one third of the titles of the public library sample. Duplication increased as overlap increased. Doll felt that the collections were dissimilar enough to encourage collaborative collection development and therefore keep the libraries separate. This group of studies demonstrate that there is potential for resource sharing and collaboration that would benefit both the public and school libraries, if barriers can be overcome (Doll, 1984; Garland, 1989), and that sharing is more likely when librarians have experience and knowledge of collaborative strategies (Smith et al., 2014).

Perceptions of Collaboration Among Librarians

Successful collaborative resource sharing may depend on positive perceptions of collaboration. Lo and Chiu (2016) studied school librarians' perceptions of collaboration with local public libraries in Hong Kong. In addition, Lo and Chiu also examined the aspects of collaboration currently existing between the two. Through semi-structured interviews with three school librarians currently collaborating with public libraries, this exploratory study discovered that school librarians felt resource sharing, particularly with electronic books and databases, could ease financial burdens. The school librarians also felt that through the cross promotion of resources, both libraries could see an increase in the use of resources.

While Lo and Chiu (2016) analyzed school librarians, Smith (2014) looked at public librarians who served youth and their perceptions of collaboration with school librarians. Smith also looked to find if there were ways to improve collaboration, specifically in rural locations. In 88 surveys returned from rural libraries around the United States, Smith found that the majority were engaged in some form of collaboration, but there was room for improvement. Some of the suggestions included better communication and information sharing about programs, more flexibility in availability, nourishing collaborative relationships, and establishing mutual interests. Many participants felt the biggest obstacle to collaboration was the lack of time. If there were ways to collaborate online, time might be less of a barrier. Furthermore, the researcher felt that both groups of librarians needed better support and education in how to collaborate and develop effective working relationships between the two. Mutual interests and a better understanding of each other and each other's jobs could lead to more sharing of resources and that would, in turn, benefit youth.

Turano (1996) noted similar findings to Smith (2014) in her study of cooperative activities between schools and public libraries in Ohio. While the study's focus was on what types of collaboration were occurring, it included survey questions about perceptions of collaboration, what factors would encourage success, and what frustrations the librarians felt. Librarians in 59 Ohio public libraries completed the survey. Turano found that most public and school libraries were engaging in some form of collaboration. This was most often in the form of class visits to the public library and promotion of public library services. Communication, sharing a common goal of educating and

serving youth, and support from the the school administration were all factors that the surveyed librarians felt were important in continuing collaborative success. The largest frustration was a lack of communication by the school librarian. Smith (2014) and Turano (1996) both demonstrate that barriers do exist for successful collaboration, but public and school librarians are interested in developing or nourishing strong collaborative partnerships (Lo & Chiu, 2016).

Student Perception and Use of Libraries and Library Resources

One of the main goals of collaboration between public and school librarians is to benefit youth. Student use of libraries and how and why they are used is an important aspect to study to make collaboration efficient and effective. Kershaw (2001) performed a study involving New Zealand secondary students and their use of the school library and their beliefs about whether it met their needs. Kershaw studied three Canterbury secondary schools with a total of 90 questionnaires sent out and the use of a small focus group. In this mixed methods study, Kershaw found that most students do use the school library. However, they did not always view it as adequate to fit their needs. Students would also use the public library as well as online resources if needed. The biggest concerns were that the libraries would run out of a particular resource needed for a school assignment and the limited number of hours the school library was open. Students found the resources wherever it was most convenient. If the school library and public library collaborated and communicated on future needs, both libraries could potentially be better prepared to meet student needs.

Clabo (2002) also studied library use practices of secondary students, but looked more closely at 11th grade student use of both the public and the school library in three east Tennessee counties. Clabo looked into the demographics behind who used both, if students who visited the libraries at a young age used the library more often as a secondary student, and if teacher use of library materials was related to student use of library materials. This quantitative study surveyed 130 students and interviewed 11. The findings indicated that students do use both the public and school library, but visited the school library more frequently. A big area of concern for both the public and school libraries were the collections of books, with students wanting more recent titles and a more diverse selection of materials. This study demonstrates the potential for collaborative collection development to meet the needs of students.

Finally, Krige (2009) chose to look at student use of libraries, but specifically at their use of digital resources and databases in the public libraries in the East Cobb area of Atlanta, Georgia. Krige looked at several areas related to her purpose, among them were why students visit the public library, what student perceptions were of digital resources and databases, what factors encourage the use of these resources, and whether the teacher's instruction in use of these resources increased independent student use. A total of 135 high school students in six high schools participated through questionnaire. Krige's findings concluded that students use the school library more often than the public library due to convenience. However, students were more likely to use the public library when encouraged to do so by teachers and were more comfortable in using public library databases after they had received instruction in their use. Among Krige's

recommendations was increased collaboration between the public and school library, specifically by cross promotion and instruction of use in databases and other digital resources. Students are using public and school libraries, but better communication and collaboration between public and school libraries could increase use of facilities and resources, lead to more efficient and effective use of resources, and better meet the needs of students.

Summary

School and public library collaboration has been studied in various ways. Most studies demonstrate that there are benefits to this collaboration. Resource sharing and collaborative collection development were listed as potential ways to ease financial burden and provide diverse collections of needed materials (Doll, 1984; Garland, 1989; Lo & Chiu, 2016). Other studies demonstrate that students are looking to the libraries to provide a range of easily accessible and diverse resources to fit their needs. Collaboration could make resources and services more readily available when students need them (Clabo, 2002; Kershaw, 2001; Krige, 2009). The literature also shows that barriers to successful collaboration do exist such as lack of time, common goals, and effective communication (Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2014; Turano, 1996). However, many public and school librarians felt these barriers could and should be overcome because of mutual interests (serving youth populations) and potential benefits which include saving money, an increase in use of resources through cross promotion and education, and the sharing of knowledge and expertise (Krige, 2009; Lo & Chiu, 2016; Smith, 2014). The implications from the literature review demonstrate there is potential

for successful collaboration that benefits all participants, if barriers to the collaboration can be overcome.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this descriptive study was to analyze and describe the collaborative relationships of teacher librarians and public librarians in one county in Iowa. The researcher was seeking to find out how collaborative relationships are established, what types of collaboration exist, what, if any, resources are being shared, and what barriers exist to successful collaboration between public and school libraries in the state.

Research Design

In order to understand the collaboration that is or is not occurring and the benefits and barriers to such collaboration, the researcher performed a qualitative study. The research methodology was a descriptive study in order to “understand a particular phenomenon for the particular purpose of using that understanding to improve a system’s or program’s design” (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 28). The researcher used a descriptive study to better understand collaboration between public and school librarians in one Iowa county. The researcher sought to understand if these collaborative relationships can be improved upon to better meet the needs of the libraries and the patrons of those libraries. Wildemuth (2009) states, “When it is important to understand a phenomenon or setting, and we do not yet understand that phenomenon or setting, then a descriptive study should be undertaken” (p. 28).

Participants

The participants in this study were limited to teacher librarians and public librarians who work in school districts and public libraries in one Iowa county. There are 10 school

districts and 12 town libraries in this county. One town library has two branches and is part of a library network system with two other town libraries. Out of those districts and town libraries, three public librarians serving youth from two town libraries and two teacher librarians from two school districts participated. This is purposive sampling which is “purposively selecting specific participants” who can provide the “richest data on the phenomena” (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 130). This county was chosen because it is the county in which the researcher works and intends to improve upon practice. The libraries and librarians were chosen in an attempt to represent the diversity of libraries and students in this county. The two youth public services librarians interviewed at one time serve an urban area of the county. Two school districts fall within its boundaries. A teacher librarian from one of those districts was interviewed. The other youth services librarian interviewed serves a much smaller, rural area of this county and only has one school district in its boundaries. A teacher librarian was interviewed from that district. However, that teacher librarian teaches students from more than one town, potentially influencing more libraries than just the one represented in this study. The school and public librarians in this county offer insight into the collaborative relationships that occur among libraries in Iowa.

Procedures

Data Sources

Semistructured interviews were used to gather the data for this study.

Semistructured interviews are used when researchers seek to “elicit information on their research topics from each subject’s perspective” (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 233).

Semistructured interviews allow for an interview guide of questions to be established, with the flexibility to clarify and elaborate answers as needed. Since the researcher was seeking to find out various perspectives on the subject of collaborative relationships, semistructured interviews allowed the researcher to come into the interview with specific questions about collaboration, as well as clarifying, follow up, or probing questions to be used as needed.

The interview questions in Appendix A were adapted from Keltner (2014). The open ended interview questions were used as a guide. The guide included essential questions, extra questions, and probing questions. Each participant was interviewed for approximately one hour. The interviews were audiorecorded.

Data Analysis

The data from the semistructured interviews was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This process uses “inductive reasoning, by which themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher’s careful examination and constant comparison” (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 309). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data was coded by initial categories and two overarching themes generated during data collection. The list of initial categories were generated through analyzing the first set of transcripts from the two public librarians in the urban center and the corresponding school librarian. Second, additional categories were generated as the coding was then applied to the rural public librarian and school librarian from that area in order a to find overarching themes.

Limitations

This study was limited to those professional teacher librarians and public librarians who serve patrons in one Iowa county. Furthermore, since the researcher lives in the county and works as an educator in one school district in the county, this allowed the researcher to identify a purposive sample of librarians. The school district in which the researcher works was not included in this research.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This was a qualitative study on collaboration between public libraries and school libraries. The data sources were face to face semi-structured interviews with three public librarians from two public libraries and two teacher librarians from two different school districts within the public libraries' regions in one county in Iowa.

Two themes emerged through the analysis of data: communication and understanding of roles. An initial list of topics were derived from the review of literature including potential benefits such as saving money, increase in resources, and sharing of expertise as well as potential barriers such as lack of time, lack of common goals, and lack of communication. These six initial topics were incorporated into the four research questions: establishing collaborative relationships, types of collaboration, sharing of resources (including benefits of saving money and increase in resources), and barriers to collaboration (such as the lack of time, shared goals and communication). These four research question topics were used to organize the interview data. The urban librarian interviews were coded first. Next the coding from the rural librarian interviews were used to improve and alter the initial list of coding categories. Codes were then compared and combined resulting in the two final themes of communication and understanding of roles.

Communication

The first theme that emerged through the data was the need for increased communication. The librarian interview responses showed that those collaborative

relationships that existed between the public and school libraries were mostly informal and irregular, even though libraries spoke of their desire for more formal collaboration. Likewise, the librarians aimed to share resources, but in actuality this was usually limited to encouraging students to visit the public library. Regular and clear communication was seen as an essential element to establishing and maintaining collaboration. Inconsistent communication was viewed as a barrier to collaboration.

Establishing Collaborative Relationships

The first research question asked how participants establish or have established collaborative relationships with their counterparts. All of the participants admitted that, for the most part, any collaborations were informal and unsystematic. While all participants agreed that collaboration was a good thing that should be happening, only the rural teacher librarian had established any sort of semi-regular, usually bi-monthly, communication with the public library and even this was largely informal. When the public librarian had ideas or promotions, she would contact the teacher librarian and vice versa.

All participants mentioned an occasional (not even consistently from year to year) meeting with all the teacher librarians in one district and the public librarians who served the district. The urban school and public librarians agreed this had not happened in the past two years. The rural teacher librarian said during the last meeting of all the teacher librarians in the district before summer, they typically invited all of the public librarians that serve the district “to come in and share discussions about summer reading and what we can do coordinate and work together.” However, this teacher librarian felt

this could be a rather frustrating experience as goals and action steps were never established, and there was never any follow up. She stated there was “lots of talk” and that it was more of a “feel good kind of thing.”

The urban public librarians interviewed were trying to establish and build relationships on a more formal level by starting with preschools and daycares. They would rotate bins of library books to the daycares and preschools and when the bins were rotating out for new ones, the public librarians would come in and do a program and talk about the public library resources with the children and employees. The public librarians were planning to continue this relationship they started with children at a pre-kindergarten level by attending open house and kindergarten orientation events at the local schools. However, this next step had yet to be taken.

Even if there were no established collaborative relationship, all of the librarians were asked about what qualities or elements were important to establishing or maintaining these relationships. The rural teacher librarian responded that “we would probably need to have more regular interactions with each other.” The urban public librarians agreed that “communication is huge” and that “having a touchdown [meeting] with them [teacher librarians] once or twice a year” would be incredibly beneficial to establishing collaborative relationships. However, the participants were either unsure or unaware of how to go about starting and then maintaining this relationship.

Any type of communication was done primarily through email, but it depended on the situation and person. Phone and Facebook were mentioned in one interview.

Meeting face to face was incredibly rare and mentioned only as something that was done in the past sporadically or as a desirable goal for the future.

Types of Collaboration

The second research question centered on types of collaboration found between libraries. Little collaboration was found to be happening between public and school librarians. Every librarian interviewed worked in some way on promoting the summer reading programs at the public libraries. This was done in varied ways depending on communication between the public and teacher librarian and/or teacher librarian initiative on the subject. The public librarians would sometimes contact the schools to provide a short informational program about the summer reading program. The school librarians would, at the very least, provide information in newsletters or other forms of communication to students and parents.

The rural teacher librarian made several attempts at collaborative projects with the public librarian. One project was a plan to coordinate anime clubs. Specifically, the last meeting of the school's anime club took place at the public library. This was done with the intention that students would continue attending the public library's anime club over the summer and bridge the gap between school years. The teacher librarian felt this collaboration was unsuccessful because of a lack of participation from students, with no students attending. This teacher librarian also coordinated with the school counselor and the public librarian to have the public librarian come in on career day to speak to students about her profession.

Participants at the urban public library mentioned a type of collaboration between public libraries and school districts still in the beginning stages. This was a part of a larger, multi-public library collaboration to get more books into children's hands. At the time of the interviews, the librarians were setting up an author visit and inviting all of the children in the communities the public libraries served. Afterwards, a copy of one of the author's books would be given to every second grader in a school district. This had just begun the previous school year and the public librarians were looking to expand in the next school year. However, this project was done largely without the cooperation of the teacher librarian in the district and instead through the administrations of the buildings involved.

Another type collaboration was mentioned during the interview with the urban teacher librarian. The teacher librarian, a special education teacher, and the public librarians had worked together to bring a group of students with special needs to the public library. Students were given a tour, told about library resources, and then received a library card. The teacher librarian thought it was a "good starting point" and she would like to do this on a more regular basis by expanding this to other groups in her school, but was "not sure how to build on this."

Resource Sharing

The third research question focused on discovering if any libraries had used resource sharing to reduce costs and duplication. There was also a desire to explore whether there was cross promotion of resources and if it increased the use of the resources if so.

The only current resource sharing that was indicated by study participants was a shared cost of an Iowa Communications Network (ICN) room between one public library and one school district. All of the participants felt there could be potential in resource sharing to ease financial burdens. All of the public librarians interviewed mentioned the possibility of purchasing popular reading materials at the public library, if these needs were communicated to them by the teacher librarians or other educators. The rural public librarian stated that “if there is a book that all the kids are asking about, we have a budget and we can buy it and they [teacher librarians] can send kids” to the public library. The public librarian felt this could be of particular benefit when the school library either could not purchase books due to budget constraints or did not have enough copies of a book to keep up with demands.

Each of the teacher librarians mentioned promoting resources located at the public library. The rural teacher librarian promoted resources and programs significantly more often than the urban teacher librarian. She stayed current on events, programs, and resources being offered at the public library by reading the newspaper, checking the public library’s website, and personally using the public library. She regularly promoted public library offerings to students through verbal interactions, posters, and online postings on the school library website. The other participating teacher librarian only suggested books that were popular, specifically the Iowa Children’s Choice Award (ICCA) nominees.

The public librarians focused on how the public library resources could benefit schools, students, and families. All public librarian participants mentioned having

multiple copies of the ICCA books for students to use. However, they all said they would like more communication from the schools about how the ICCA books are being used in the classrooms and what type of other books (books not on the list) are popular and being read. “Kids come in and say they want an ICCA book, but what does that mean?” asked one urban public librarian. She felt if there was more clarification from educators and teacher librarians on how to promote these books, she could better serve student and educator needs.

Understanding of Roles

The second theme that emerged through the data was a need for a greater understanding of roles by both types of librarians. For example, the urban teacher librarian admitted to not having a clear understanding of public librarian jobs and felt there needed to be “better awareness of each other.” And likewise, public librarians said they were aware of a lack of understanding of the goals and objectives regarding their teacher librarian counterparts. Even though some of the librarians stated that they believed they had a joint mission to impact students and families, they felt as though the barriers to collaboration noted were largely a result of this lack of understanding of one another’s roles.

Barriers to Collaboration

The fourth research question focused on barriers to collaboration, including those such as lack of time and lack of common goals. As discussed previously, every participant agreed that collaboration was a potentially beneficial act that should be occurring, but was not in any formal way. To find out why collaboration was limited at

best, the fourth research question asked the participants about perceived barriers to collaboration.

The first response from all participants was that time was a barrier to collaboration. All felt that they were busy and that their counterparts were also busy. There simply was not enough time in the day or school year to find time to regularly meet and formally collaborate. As one teacher librarian said, "I'm a really big supporter of the public library and would love to find ways to collaborate together. I just don't know how to make that happen within the time constraints we are dealing with."

Another barrier mentioned in three interviews was that to truly collaborate with all of the districts, buildings, teacher librarians, and public libraries they served, it involved a lot of participants. The concern was that as difficult as it was to get one teacher librarian and one public librarian to sit down together, it becomes that much more difficult the more individuals and institutions that could or should be involved. As one teacher librarian noted, "we have a lot of players" with multiple small community libraries serving the district. She felt these libraries had "fewer resources and less time," and she did not "have a personal connection to those libraries." These factors limited her collaborations with public librarians.

A related barrier is that roles, jobs, and structures of positions often change. The public librarians specifically spoke of this lack of understanding of roles as a strong barrier to collaboration. They felt they did not know who to contact at the various schools in a given school year. The urban public librarians stated this as a strong barrier more than once during the interview stating that with staffing changes and varying

contact preferences at numerous schools it was a “hard thing to find the right contact.” Their previous contact had changed or was no longer the appropriate person to contact.

A lack of understanding staffing roles and who to contact reflects this misunderstanding of positions in the public and school libraries. While the rural teacher librarian felt there was “an intellectual understanding that we do have a joint common mission about building relationships with communities, and developing good readers, and good users of information” there still had not been success in collaborating. The urban teacher librarian felt the complete opposite and said there needed to be a “better awareness of each other” and that there needed to be a more clear understanding of what each does in their roles. The public librarians stated the lack of understanding was in the teacher librarians knowing the variety and depth of resources the public library has to offer to educators, families, and students.

Public librarians also mentioned miscommunication or a lack of communication as a barrier. They felt strongly that if given advance notice of programs, projects, and other needs by the schools, they could properly prepare at the public library. The urban public librarians stated that “having a little leeway or advance notice, can help us prepare with programming and pulling books” and could even allow the public librarians to “build up a stock” through book ordering or setting materials aside.

All of the librarians agreed that collaborations would probably be more successful if more consistent communication was established. While recognizing that regular meetings may not be feasible, the suggestion by the urban public librarians was just two meetings a year would be a good start to collaboration. The participants stated that one

meeting towards the beginning of the school year and a second in the middle of the school year would help them prepare and help support the schools, teachers, and students.

Finally, the rural teacher librarian mentioned a lack of desire or commitment to work together as a potential barrier to collaboration. She felt that public and teacher librarians believed in collaboration and collaborative projects, but were somewhat resistant to giving up their time to help initiate and maintain these collaborations. She stated they were supportive of projects she had come up with in the past, but were not inclined to help. For example, the teacher librarian had thought a summer bookmobile to the small communities in the district might be a good way to “get us [teacher librarians] out in the community” but it was “difficult to get other teacher librarians to do anything in the summer,” and she received no active support from other librarians.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this descriptive study was to analyze and describe the collaborative relationships of teacher librarians and public librarians in one Iowa county. The research focused on how collaborative relationships are established between public and school libraries, what type of collaborations exist, what resources are shared, and what barriers to successful collaboration exist. This was a qualitative study done through semistructured interviews with three public youth services librarians in two public libraries and two teacher librarians in two districts in this county. The findings included an overall desire to collaborate with other libraries in the area, but difficulty in establishing these relationships due to real or perceived barriers. Informal collaboration occurred in sporadic fashion between public libraries and schools, but not necessarily with the school librarian and mostly consisted of sharing of information about the summer reading program.

Conclusions

Both public and teacher librarians agreed that collaboration was a great idea and wanted to collaborate more, however, establishing and maintaining these relationships was not happening, mostly due to time barriers. This result was supported by the studies of Lo and Chiu (2016), Smith (2014), Smith et al. (2014), and Turano (1996). The participating librarians in these studies had limited collaborations, but their experiences were positive and were seeking ways to overcome barriers.

Since establishing and maintaining collaborative relationships was not pursued, it is unsurprising that the types of collaboration that did occur were limited and informal. All participating librarians collaborated in some form on sharing of summer reading program information. Other collaborations were unsystematic and depended on the librarians sharing information with other librarians.

Resource sharing was promotional and depended on the librarian, predominantly the teacher librarian, making subjective choices about what was or was not important information about the public library to share. The public librarians stressed the valuable resources the public library could offer and felt these resources were not used to the fullest extent. Some of these librarians are at a beginning stage, moving towards these collaborative relationships. Others have positive perceptions of collaboration, but it is not a priority at this time.

Real and perceived barriers limited or stopped collaboration. Time was the most significant barrier to collaboration. All participants felt they were too busy and assumed their counterparts were too busy. That combined with other barriers limited the collaboration.

As stated and demonstrated in Smith (2014), Smith et al. (2014), and Turano (1996) communication is key to collaboration. If one party fails to communicate consistently or at all, the other party may quickly lose interest or desire to continue. All of the participants mentioned communication as a barrier when done poorly.

Finally, while the librarians seemed to think that there was a broad understanding of the roles each of the librarians had, there was a desire to meet and create a more formal

understanding of each other's roles and positions. The public librarians felt very strongly that they had extremely valuable resources to share with educators, students, and communities that were not being taken advantage of by the schools. The public librarian participants even stated there were potential opportunities for purchasing popular, needed books at the public library for the schools to use, but clearer communication was needed.

The findings of this research are very similar to those of other studies on the subject. There is limited collaboration occurring between the public librarians and school librarians in the studied area. The barriers, most significantly the lack of perceived time to collaborate, hinder or stop formal collaboration. There is potential for collaboration, if several librarians, both public and school, take initiative and start consistent communication with their counterparts. It seems if formal meetings, with goals and action steps, are established, these relationships could be maintained and collaborative projects and potentially resource sharing could be accomplished. It may also be beneficial to understanding the roles of other librarians if there was time devoted to sharing current or upcoming projects and/or books and materials the librarians are excited about coming into the libraries. There would be a better understanding of the roles the librarians have in their schools, libraries, and communities and diverse and varied collaborations could occur.

Recommendations

The conclusions drawn from this study lead to many possible recommendations for future collaborations to be successful. There should be meetings between public and

school librarians in a district. These should happen at least once to twice a year. If there are multiple public or school librarians who should be involved, perhaps voting or selecting one or two people to serve on the committee would be beneficial. For example, if the school district feels it has too many school librarians to try and set up one to two meetings a year that every librarian can attend, selecting one or two of the school librarians to serve as primary communicators with the public librarians might be more beneficial. Those school librarians could then collect and disseminate information as needed. These meetings should have clear goals, actions steps, and follow up as needed.

Communication is key to these relationships starting and lasting. It may be beneficial to set up a regular schedule of communication throughout the year, beyond one or two meetings. This could be decided by the participants as to the best possible way to go about this. It may be a monthly email or phone call with various projects, events, and ideas. Another suggestion is to initiate a co-owned and co-edited calendar and/or document that is consistently updated.

One suggestion that emerged from the interview with the two urban public librarians was to have a common listserv that public librarians, school librarians, educators, and other interested parties could choose to be part of to keep informed. For example, a teacher could post a question about a unit or lesson being taught and then not only could others (school or public librarians) keep current on what is happening in classrooms, but they could also offer suggestions on what the library or libraries could offer to help support that lesson or unit. It would also be a potential opportunity for all participating parties to keep informed of events, projects, and other information. Another possible

benefit of an electronic discussion list is that participants choose whether to participate and at what level. In this way, school librarians and public librarians could collaborate, along with other educators in a potentially efficient and effective way.

To truly understand library collaboration occurring in the United States, and particularly in Iowa, a larger study is necessary that would include more participants from varied and diverse school districts and cities across the state. This would give librarians and other stakeholders a better understanding of collaborative relationships between school and public librarians and a better idea of how to establish and maintain successful collaborations.

Another recommendation is to study the collaborative relationship between school and public librarians where the school library shares a facility with the public library. Examining these combined libraries could help librarians understand what collaboration strategies are used to make this dynamic successful and how each librarian understands one's role as well as the role of one's counterpart

Finally, as the research supports, there is potential for collaboration and librarians are receptive to collaboration, but barriers often exist to limit or stop it from occurring. It would be beneficial to find out if there are any teacher librarians and public librarians in the state of Iowa who already have a healthy and successful collaborative relationship established and conduct a more in depth study of their relationship. If the action steps and goals were known about how these relationships are established and maintained, it may serve as a guide to other librarians.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER LIBRARIANS

Questions adapted from Keltner (2014)

1. Do you currently collaborate with the public library staff? What is your current role in this relationship?
2. If there is a collaborative relationship, how was this relationship established? Who initiated contact and is there continued support for collaboration from all parties involved?
3. What do you see as important elements to continue or to improve upon this collaborative relationship? What is crucial to maintaining a collaborative relationship?
 - a. Extra Question: What do you see as an ideal collaborative relationship?
 - b. Probing Question: What do you wish public librarians understood about your job and what you do?
 - c. Probing Question: What do you want to know about what public librarians' jobs and what they do?
4. What do you perceive as barriers to collaboration? Have you encountered these barriers before and have they been overcome? Why or why not?
5. Do you currently share resources with the public library? If so, what resources?
6. Do you do any collaborative collection development with the public library? If so, does your selection policy reflect that?
 - a. Probing Question: If you do not, would you consider collaborative collection development?
7. Do you recommend resources at the public library to students, particularly if you do not have that resource in your library? Do you promote programming and activities occurring at or sponsored by the public library?
8. Do you feel support for collaboration from your school administration?

9. Do you share information about upcoming projects and assignments with the public librarians? If so, what and when do you share this? If not, would you consider doing so and why do you not currently do so?
10. Do you share any costs with the public library? If so, what? If not, do you feel that future collaborations could alleviate some financial burdens?
11. If you do collaborate, are there common goals set? How were these created? Do you ever evaluate and update these goals?
12. How do you communicate with the public library staff? (Phone, face-to-face, email, other)

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIANS

1. Do you currently collaborate with any school librarians? What is your current role in this relationship?
2. If there is a collaborative relationship, how was this relationship established? Who initiated contact and is there continued support for collaboration from all parties involved?
3. What do you see as important elements to continue or to improve upon this collaborative relationship? What is crucial to maintaining a collaborative relationship?
 - a. Extra Question: What do you see as an ideal collaborative relationship?
 - b. Probing Question: What is your understanding of the school librarian's job, as in, do you know what their goals and jobs are on a daily basis?
 - c. Probing Question: What goal would you most like the school librarian to understand and support about your position/job?
4. What do you perceive as barriers to collaboration? Have you encountered these barriers before and have they been overcome? Why or why not?
5. Do you currently share resources with the school library or libraries? If so, what resources?
6. Do you do any collaborative collection development with the school libraries? If so, does your selection policy reflect that?
 - a. Probing Question: If you do not, would you consider collaborative collection development? Why or why not?
7. What sort of support do you receive from the administration in terms of collaboration between the public library and the school library?
8. Do you share any costs with the school libraries or libraries? If so, what? If not, do you feel that future collaborations could alleviate some financial burdens?
9. If you do collaborate, are there common goals set? What are these goals? How were these created? Do you ever evaluate and update these goals?

10. How do you communicate with the school library? (Phone, face-to-face, email, other)