Faculty Publications

Summer 2011

Collaborative Ideas for a School Library

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Collaborative Ideas

FOR A SCHOOL LIBRARY

S ome 75 studies conducted over the past half century show that school library media programs have a positive effect on students' academic achievement.[1] During the years 1996-2006 alone, 23 studies supported the value of school libraries in student achievement, and 14 confirmed the value of collaboration.[2] According to studies conducted by the Library Research Services of the Colorado State Library and the University of Denver, the greatest single factor in student achievement—second only to socio-economic status—is the school library. Students who attend schools where the teachers and librarians work together in planning, teaching, and integrating information literacy in the curriculum tend to have higher achievement scores.[3]

Librarians have always promoted knowledge access, a role that is even more significant today, with the amount of information bombarding students on a daily basis. Granting librarians information "leader-acy" positions and collaborative roles in teaching, learning, curriculum planning, and program administration fits well with the established guidelines by the Association of School Librarians, the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.[4] Students' educational development will be enhanced when principals, teachers, and librarians collaborate in learning, teaching, and implementing critical-thinking skills.

Collaborative Opportunities

Collaboration by every member of the school staff is necessary in this information age.[5] This cooperation can easily extend beyond the school premises to include community resources such as families, churches, public libraries, business establishments, museums, state parks, Rotary Clubs, etc. It can also cross geo-political borders through the use of the Internet, helping students to understand how other people live and learn.

The success of a collaborative relationship starts with the school principal and the value he or she places on hiring qualified/certified/credentialed school librarians and providing a functional school library to ensure that the school graduates high-achieving information-literate students. Principals are the driving force behind the cooperation and collaboration that unite the administration, the teachers, and the school librarians. Visionary principals involve school librarians in facilitating school reforms, orienting teachers, and strengthening community relations.[6]

Collaborative Ideas and Activities

Collaborative activities such as competitions, exercises, reading programs, storytelling, role playing, and field trips promote active learning. Students learn best through active participation and utilization of print and electronic resources, as they collaborate within the school or with other schools, libraries, and students across state, provincial, and country borders.

School Administration, Teachers, and Students

Principals, teachers, and librarians can make an effective team in curriculum development and teaching if they work together to plan activities that challenge and motivate students. In order to broaden and deepen their students' learning, school personnel can utilize activities that engage more than one sense and encourage interaction with people, machines, and virtual reality. The development of information-literacy skills should

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start with the lower grades through alphabetization, sequencing, conversations, and brainstorming; and progress through the higher grades with role playing, presentations, poster sessions, and computer-generated projects.

One school in California developed a lesson about U.S. presidential elections that involved every level from kindergartners to the faculty and staff. After researching the candidates at the computer lab, the students made presentations complete with posters and signs. They also registered at registration tables, voted in mock election booths, and tallied the results using spreadsheets and graphs.[7]

Parents and the Community

Schools can enlist the cooperation of students from kindergarten to junior high level to plan a Family Literacy Night. Holy Cross School in Kemptville, Ontario, hosted this type of program to coincide with Canada's Family Literacy Day. The librarian initiated the idea and received support from both administration and teachers. Teams were formed to plan children's activities at different levels, literacy presentations and handouts for parents, and fun activities such as drawings, refreshments, decorations, etc. The school solicited donations from local businesses, publishers, and bookstores for door prizes and refreshments. The event drew 150 parents and 200 students.[8]

Teachers can also connect with the senior citizens in the community. Spellbinders is an organization of senior volunteer storytellers whose aim is to connect older and younger generations through the art of storytelling. Schools in the U.S. can consult http://www.spellbinders.org to see if there are storytellers in their locality whom they can invite to the storytelling sessions at information-literacy programs.[9]

Teachers should explore the public library in their community as well as local museums, colleges, and universities for educational activities that can be integrated with the school's information-literacy program and various classes. The Read.gov (http://www.read.gov) and National Educational Association's Read Across America (http://www.nea.org/grants/886.htm) Websites offer many resources for schools.

Beyond Geo-Political Borders

Teachers can broaden their classes' cultural connections by encouraging students to explore the world online. Oak Hill Elementary School in Morgantown, North Carolina, partnered with the Appalachian State University's Reich College of Education Library Science program to connect with the Th'uruchapitas Library in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The school library set up a

A librarian and a teacher sit down together to plan information-literacy activities for their school.

Principals/Administrators

- Equip the librarians for leadership roles.[10]
- Grant the librarians flexible schedules.[11]
- Provide the library with adequate funding for technology and clerical support.[12]
- Involve librarians in faculty meetings as well as committee meetings dealing with curriculum development, standards, assessment, and outreach activities.
- Ask the librarians to teach, not just to substitute teach.[13]
- Support and foster teacher-librarian collaboration.

Teachers

- Consider the librarian a co-teacher in the classroom.
- Develop partnerships between the librarian, the teachers, and the principal to meet the school's mission and goals.
- Plan and assess class activities with the librarian.
- Participate in librarian-initiated programs and projects.

- Encourage the students to value the library's role in education.
- Contribute to the growth, development, and use of the library's collections and services.

School Librarians

- Establish good relationships with the teachers and principals by soliciting their assistance in developing library collections and programs, in showing the relationships between information literacy and content-related objectives, by raising their expectations of what the library can do, and by being an expert on curriculum goals.[14]
- Be involved in committee work, faculty meetings, and in-service workshops either as a participant or a presenter.[15]
- Lead out in special events and projects (i.e., co-directing plays, sponsoring author visits and general school projects, designing the school Website, offering job-training programs).[16]
- Serve as the school's technology leader. Teach and model ethical use of technology; work with teachers in instructional design, planning, and teaching; and help teachers integrate technology and information literacy in the curriculum.[17]
- Be aware of standards and educational reforms. Gain an understanding of the skill sets needed to develop reading programs and collections.[18]
- Apply different methods of communication: send lists of highly recommended Websites to teachers via e-mail, publish newsletters with tips on how to get the library involved in the classroom, and submit reports and weekly schedules to the principal.[19]

School libraries perform a public service by hosting a variety of seminars, ranging from Family Literacy Night to collaborative programs with museums, public libraries, and local universities.

Giving Tree and awarded each child a jingle bell for every dollar placed in an envelope on the tree. The classes were also encouraged to donate books in Spanish and to paste a class photograph in each book. At the end of the fund-raising campaign, the school donated 33 Spanish books and $560 for the building fund of their sister school in Bolivia.[20]

Another way to stimulate student interest is to share stories with people around the world by participating in the Story Book Project. This program "encourages students to read, research, and relate stories to their own lives while connecting with others." Story boxes travel around the world (China, Australia, India, etc.)

and throughout the United States via story ambassadors and are managed by story keepers.[21]

As components of a worldwide church, Adventist schools should be able to connect with other schools in the same state, union, or conference, or go beyond political borders to communicate with institutions in other world divisions. Principals and school librarians who would like to arrange such partnerships can consult the Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook (http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?) for contact information. To network with their Seventh-day Adventist colleagues, librarians may look up the Association of Seventh-day Adventist Librarians Website (http://spinergy.southern.edu/asdalhere/) and contact the president of the association or the chair of the School Libraries Section.

School librarians can benefit from exploring what other librarians in their state, nation, or other countries are doing. Participation in conferences and Web-based seminars sponsored by

professional associations like the American Association of School Librarians (http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/index.cfm) or the International Association of School Librarianship (http://www.iasl-online.org/) will enable school librarians to meet colleagues with whom they can network. Joining their organizations will help them grow on the job and open their eyes to collaborative opportunities.

Virtual Connections

Virtual field trips are a boon when gas prices are high and the economy is in a slump, allowing students to learn about nature by "visiting" the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park (http://nationalzoo.si.edu), the San Diego Zoo (http://www.sandiegozoo.org/), the Amazon River Dolphins (http://www.virtualexplorers.org/ARD/index.htm),[22] or the Australia Zoo (http://australiazoo.com.au/). They can learn about music and history at the National Geographic Education Website (http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/), can study art through a virtual trip in the Louvre Museum (http://www.louvre.fr/llv/commun/home.jsp) and other major art museums and galleries throughout the world (http://icom.museum/vlmp/galleries.html), and walk up and down the streets of Rome or Tokyo or visit No. 10 Downing Street in London using Google Maps (http://maps.google.com/).[23]

The Internet has shrunk our world and made communication much easier. Blogs and podcasts are great ways to participate in book discussions and book talks.[24] Web 2.0 allows users to create works and contribute to social networks. A plethora of Internet sites encourages collaborative active learning, such as the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration (http://cilc.org), the Global SchoolNet: Collaborative Learning Center (http://www.globalschoolnet.org/gsncenter/), and the ePals Global Community (http://www.epals.com/).

The AASL Best WebSites for Teaching and Learning (http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/guidelinesandstandards/bestlist/bestwebsites.cfm) is worth checking out. The latest Web developments are available from sites such as Infomancy (http://www.schoolof.info/infomancy) and TechCrunch (http://www.techcrunch.com). School librarians, teachers, and principals can collaborate to discover sites that fit into their schools' learning environment and mission.

The Challenge

Currently, many Adventist schools do not have certified librarians who can implement the suggestions given above. However, this situation can be remedied. One possibility is to send the persons currently functioning as librarians for library science classes during school vacations or have them take classes online. Volunteers from the community may be willing to carry out the library's day-to-day operations in the absence of the librarians. Principals may be able to recruit retired professional librarians or library staff members to spend a few months away from their areas of residence to run the libraries while the current librarians upgrade their skills. There are professionals who have given their services to stabilize struggling libraries and mentored potential librarians in the past and who would still be willing to help out. ✍

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