Foreword

Collaboration is at the very foundation of the practice of school librarians. Yet this concept still eludes many inside and outside our profession. Collaboration is defined in many ways, but what it always comes back to for me is building relationships based on trust and respect and connecting with colleagues in order to work together to create learning opportunities that can positively influence student learning.

The ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians (2010) focus on the school librarian as an “effective and knowledgeable teacher” as well as an instructional partner” that can “model and promote collaborative planning, instruction in multiple literacies, and inquiry-based learning, enabling members of the learning community to become effective users and creators of ideas and information” (p. 2). Yet as demonstrated in the research of the field, questions remain about what collaboration is, why we should collaborate, what collaboration looks like, and how you get teachers to collaborate in the first place. As a practitioner, I have heard these questions from colleagues frequently, and now, as an educator, I hear these same questions from my students.

This book seeks to answer those lingering questions about collaboration through exploring both research and practice. This combination is necessary. In order to understand the underpinnings of collaboration and why it is so important to our profession one must first understand the theories and research that form the foundation of practice. Yet, this understanding is not enough, and through pairing the research with the real-world illustrations of collaboration in action, this book makes that mandatory connection in the current educational context.

It is also important to note the timeliness of this book – the collaborative relationship between school librarians and teachers is changing and evolving due to the current education environment. The emergence of technology as a critical tool for teaching and learning has provided an opportunity for school librarians to further develop this relationship by offering their expertise as information specialists. This is prominent in the research chapters where the authors examine school librarians’ collaborative efforts in the areas of digital literacy instruction, technology integration, and the development of 21st century skills. The role of technology has also become prevalent in answering the question of how we collaborate. The research in this book recognizes that time is a frequently cited obstacle to collaboration and examines how technological resources and online collaboration tools can be utilized to overcome the barrier of time by allowing everyone to contribute asynchronously on their own schedule, when they do have time, no matter their location.

The contributions of the school librarian to reading, language development, inquiry, and project-based learning are investigated as well. The research highlights relationships with a variety of content area specialists, including fine arts teachers and special education teachers, and how school librarians are forming these partnerships to address the needs of all learners through collaborative endeavors.
Even as research-based evidence is presented for the value of these successful instructional partnerships, school librarians still experience barriers in enacting this role. The researchers of this field acknowledge that there are continued struggles with colleagues and administrators that are unaware of the importance of this role. Yet, sometimes it is the school librarians themselves who are reluctant to practice or support this role, citing that they are not adequately prepared to effectively collaborate with classroom teachers. The authors offer multiple perspectives on addressing and overcoming these obstacles with research and practical strategies to implement in practice.

In presenting field-based examples, this book makes that connection to the real-world that is so desperately needed to answer the questions about how one collaborates, how it works, and what it looks like in action. The exemplary collaborations described here are models to provide strategies and best practices for how school librarians take a proactive role in initiating collaborative endeavors, building relationships, navigating the process, contributing to the learning experience, and making a positive impact on achievement. These current voices from the field also demonstrate how school librarians can work with teachers to address multiple literacies by designing and delivering technology-enhanced, engaging instruction that brings a fresh perspective to a variety of topics ranging from Shakespeare to the use of Libguides. Authors also address how school librarians can include and involve students in the collaborative process, as they become active participants in their own learning. Finally, models provide an inside look at collaborative partnerships as an integral element of effective practice, a successful program, and an enabler of leadership.

In this time of accountability, it has become vital that school librarians demonstrate how they are impacting student learning, but we cannot do it alone. Collaboration with teachers is the vehicle; it is an opportunity for school librarians, as educators, to contribute to the learning process. School librarians have much to bring to the table, including fresh ideas, new resources, expertise as information specialists, and differing teaching styles that can infuse different methods and perspectives on delivering instruction. When school librarians partner with teachers to plan, design, teach, and assess, students benefit from richer learning experiences.

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REFERENCES