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Catch them (preservice teachers) while you can!

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Catch them (preservice teachers) while you can!

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT PRESERVICE AND PRACTICING CLASSROOM TEACHERS ARE TYPICALLY UNAWARE OF THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER-LIBRARIAN AS A COLLABORATIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PARTNER AND THAT UNIVERSITY TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS DO LITTLE TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE. THIS ARTICLE ADDRESSES ONE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL LIBRARY INSTRUCTOR'S APPROACH TO REMEDY THIS DEFICIT BY WORKING THROUGH THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT USING A MULTILAYERED APPROACH-- THAT IS, MEETING WITH PRESERVICE TEACHERS EARLY IN THEIR SEQUENCE OF COURSEWORK, AGAIN DURING THEIR JUNIOR YEAR, AND FINALLY JUST BEFORE THEIR GOING OUT FOR STUDENT TEACHING. THE ARTICLE CONCLUDES WITH A CHALLENGE TO CATCH THEM--PRESERVICE TEACHERS--WHILE WE CAN.

This year I began my 25th year in the school library profession. After 20 years as a building-level teacher-librarian in K-12 public schools, I am in my 5th year as a faculty member in the Department of Education of a 4-year public university. My experience tells me that the majority of classroom teachers do not have a clue as to what teacher-librarians can do to help them with instruction and their students with learning. My experience also tells me that the majority of preservice teachers are not learning in their teacher preparation programs about the benefits of collaborative partnerships with teacher-librarians. Neither practicing teachers nor preservice teachers see teacher-librarians as teachers and instructional partners, and this issue needs to be addressed.

Sadly, my personal experience is confirmed by the literature. In a study conducted at the University of Pittsburgh, School of Education (Getz, 1991), there was no difference in the attitudes of preservice education students and practicing teachers toward working cooperatively with the teacher-librarian in the instructional process: Although both groups viewed teacher-librarians positively, neither engaged in cooperative activities. Wolcott, Lawless, and Hobbs (1999) examined preservice teachers' beliefs about the role of the teacher-librarian, looking at whether teacher education programs are preparing tomorrow's teachers to expect and accept teacher-librarians' taking an active role in teaching. The researchers found that preservice teachers look to teacher-librarians more for information access and delivery than they do for teaching and learning.

In a recent issue of *Knowledge Quest*, Chesky and Meyer (2004) report on a grant they received from the Institute for Library Information and Literacy Education, Kent State University, OH. Noting that "teacher education programs in our area do not portray the school library media center as a curriculum resource or the school librarian as a collaborative partner" (p. 20), Chesky and Meyer are targeting new teachers to make them aware of the collaborative instructional role of the teacher-librarian and the benefits that they and their students can gain from such collaboration.

Hartzell (2002) notes that "aspiring teachers are not provided with any model or expectation that school librarians should be regarded as partners in curriculum and instruction" (p. 2). Unless we tell them, they will not know. In fact, Getz (1991) recommends that "schools of education and schools of library science provide their students with instruction in school librarianship and offer opportunities to practice co-operative attitudes" (p. v). At Longwood University, we are attempting to do just that.

HIGHER EDUCATION

My first challenge as a faculty member in the Department of Education is to make fellow faculty members aware of the collaborative instructional role of the teacher-librarian in today's schools. Hartzell (2003) describes college and university professors as "a target that librarians have long neglected ... the people who prepare new teachers and administrators, shaping their initial professional values in the process" (p. 41). No opportunity for advocacy with my colleagues therefore passes me by! From decorative reading and library theme pins worn daily, to bulletin boards outside my office promoting reading, libraries, and collaboration, to sound bites at department faculty meetings, I constantly "talk" libraries, teacher-librarians, and our role in today's schools. Once faculty members' awareness is raised, my next step is to volunteer to speak to their classes. I have a three-pronged approach to catch preservice teachers while I can: first, when our students are taking introductory education courses; second, when our

partnership students are working out in the schools during their junior year; and third, when our student teachers are in their final semester before program completion.

INTRODUCING TO THE TEACHING PROFESSION

All students in our education program are required to take an Introduction to the Teaching Profession course, typically during their sophomore year. This course provides an overview of teaching and schooling that addresses the foundations of education and the professional aspects of teaching. Emphasis on the history and philosophy of education; school organization; governance; legal and financial issues; teacher preparation; professional development; practicum preparation; and lesson planning. (Longwood University, 2004, Education Course Descriptions section, 3) Each semester I volunteer to speak to the Introduction to the Teaching Profession classes.

My primary objective in visiting these classes is to raise awareness of what today's teacher-librarian can do to assist in instruction-laying the groundwork for library use early in their teacher preparation training to broaden the perspective of these early preservice teachers. When I visit the Introduction to Teaching classes, I discuss the information specialist role of the teacher-librarian, pointing out that the teacher-librarian will be the one to provide them with professional, informational, and instructional resources. As an example, I share with them information that I think will be helpful to them as they move through teacher preparation coursework-information about copyright, databases that will be useful in their research, and web sites for lesson plans-and I emphasize that, once they are in schools, their teacher-librarians will be their sources for similar pertinent information.

However, as I talk with these teaching students, my primary focus is the teacher and instructional partner roles of the teacher-librarian. Many of the students have said to me, "Wow! I did not know that librarians did that," or "I did not know that the librarian would teach with me or would reinforce in the library what I might be teaching in the classroom." I give examples of areas that the teacher-librarian might teach, such as evaluation of potential sources for a project, and examples of areas that lend themselves well to partnerships between the teacher-librarian and the classroom teacher, such as author studies or research projects. We also discuss the importance of communication between the classroom teacher and the teacher-librarian. In this introductory course, I try to plant the seeds for an understanding of the active role of the teacher-librarian in today's schools.

PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS

During their junior year, our students in elementary school and middle school teacher preparation participate in the partnership semester: This semester provides the second opportunity for me to talk with them about the importance of working and collaborating with their teacher-librarians. For the partnership experience, our students spend 4 days a week for the entire semester in an area school. Half of each day is spent in university methods coursework taught by a university professor onsite in the public school; the other half of the day is spent in the classroom with the teacher and class to which they are assigned. During their partnership semester, because they are actually working on a daily basis in the classrooms, our students are ready for concrete examples of how the teacher-librarian can assist them in curriculum and instruction. At the request of the university partnership professor, I spend about 2 hours talking with the partnership students.

Again, my approach is how the teacher-librarian can assist the classroom teacher as an information specialist and as a teacher and instructional partner. In small groups, students analyze content area standards and brainstorm ways in which the classroom teacher and the teacher-librarian could collaborate to address these standards. Going beyond reading and language arts, in the context of the various content areas, we discuss databases appropriate for the K-12 environment, such as SIRS Knowledge Source and the Gale Infotrac products, and information literacy skills that the teacher-librarian can teach students, such as information access and retrieval skills, note taking and paraphrasing skills, and methods for citing sources. These partnership students-preservice teachers-admit to thinking of the teacher-librarian in a different light following our discussions.

For our students in secondary school teacher preparation, there is no semester partnership experience, so I must work through various content areas to reach these future teachers. Again, advocacy and outreach are required to make the connection with colleagues in the College of Arts and Sciences-the professor "in charge" of science teacher

education, English teacher education, math teacher education, and so forth. Given the opportunity to speak to these classes, I title my presentation "Powerful Partnerships @ [name of library]," "Every Student Succeeds @ [name of library]," or "10 Thoughts on How the TL and the Science Teacher [for example] Can Partner to Help Students Learn!" For each presentation, I have 10 discussion points-namely, to

1. provide quality resources,
2. tape public television instructional programs,
3. create connections to "good" teacher web sites,
4. create connections to professional journals,
5. assist students with the research process,
6. assist students with searching for resources effectively,
7. assist students with locating and evaluating resources for research,
8. teach students how to evaluate web sites and how to cite sources,
9. prepare pathfinders for students to help focus their research,
10. encourage and promote ethical use of information.

For each point, I give specific content examples of how the teacher-librarian can partner with the secondary classroom teacher to affect instruction.

STUDENT TEACHERS

My third opportunity to speak to our preservice teachers to reinforce the concept of today's teacher-librarian as a collaborative teaching partner comes at the beginning of their student teaching semester. Here I use a modified CPR model, reminding them that teacher-librarians provide resources and promote reading but that they also assist with research process instruction and reinforce classroom learning (R); that teacher-librarians are all about collaboration, that communication is critical, that teacher-librarians have tremendous curriculum knowledge and provide connections to the world, and that we are colleagues in teaching (C); and that partnerships promote learning (P). I even give the student teachers a homework assignment: In their first days in their assigned school, they are to make it a point to meet with the teacher-librarian.

Concurrently, I post a message to our state school library association listserv, alerting teacher-librarians to fact that the student teachers will soon be in their schools. I remind them that a library convert early in the career may be a library user and supporter for life. Successful experience with a teacher-librarian during student teaching goes a long way to develop a library user for the remainder of an educational career. Teacher-librarians across the state respond, as evidenced by this reply to my posting:

Thank you so much for doing this. If we get one of your students, I will be on the look out and go for him/her if they do not come to me. I will pass this on to my friend who is a 5th-grade teacher at another school; she is getting a Longwood Student. I once mentioned this idea to [the division contact for student teachers]. It really pleases me to see it coming from the college. (J. Koch, personal communication, January 18, 2004)

SPECIAL REQUESTS

Of course, there is always room for special requests, and I believe in capitalizing on every opportunity. One of our education professors invites me to address her junior level assessment classes each semester. She requests that I share with her students all the resources available on the Web for our state Standards of Learning-the SOL themselves, curriculum framework and scope and sequence guides, test blueprints, and sample test items from previous years' tests. As I demonstrate how to access these resources, I emphasize that my field is school library media, that I can share this information with them because I am an information specialist, and that teacher-librarians in their schools are just as in tune with the standards and curriculum as I am. I point out that teacher-librarians are concerned with student achievement and that they work to connect information literacy instruction to standards that are tested.

Last year, one of the partnership professors requested a special twist on my presentation for her elementary preservice teachers. In addition to asking me to talk about the teacher-librarian as an instructional partner, she asked me to focus on literature connections to curriculum standards, particularly in the areas of math and science. Elementary teacher-librarians from across the state shared almost 150 titles of books that connect with and reinforce concepts in various Standards of Learning. When I met with the partnership students, for math connections, for example, we discussed *Millions to Measure* (Schwartz, 2003; calculating measurement using the metric system) and *Mathematikles* (Franco, 2003; poems written in the form of mathematical problems, in seasonal themes). For science we discussed *Pumpkin Circle* (Levenson, 2000; life cycles of plants) and *All You Need for a Snowman* (Schertle, 2002; snow and winter weather). The preservice teachers left the session with useful information (books correlated to state curriculum standards) and with new ideas about ways to connect with their teacher-librarians.

Another special request sometimes comes from our special education program faculty. Of course, collaboration is integral to special education, but our professors ask me to specifically address the role of the teacher-librarian in collaboration with the special education teacher. We discuss how partnerships promote learning, how the teacher-librarian can serve as a resource person and information provider, and how the teacher-librarian can team-teach with the special education teacher.

MODEL COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

To provide a model for collaboration and partnerships between teacher-librarians and classroom teachers, one project that we have instituted at Longwood is our Longwood Literature Page. Several publishing companies donate new children's books. Students in our school library program write book reviews; then preservice teachers in various methods courses write matching lesson plans. Students enrolled in the special education and communications disorders programs write adaptations for the lesson plans. Through cooperative ventures such as these, we work to promote the concept of collaboration and teamwork at the onset of these educators' careers.

CHALLENGES

Hartzell (2002) asserts that "once into positions as teachers ... they [teachers] get caught up in the imperatives of their own environments, and it becomes very difficult for them to expand their conceptual horizons. Teaching is demanding" (p. 3). Our strategy should therefore be to catch them while we can. With repeated exposure to the concept of teacher-librarians as collaborative instructional partners while they are preservice teachers, we can affect these educators during the formative stages of their educational philosophy and thought processes. Hartzell notes that "few teacher-training programs contain any systematic instruction in how librarians might improve instruction, serve in staff development projects, assist with special student populations, or provide administrative support" (p. 2). Our challenge then, for those of us in college and university settings, is to connect, inform, and advocate. For those in libraries who are working as teacher-librarians, volunteer to speak with preservice teachers at colleges and universities; approach and convert preservice, student, and new teachers. We must use every opportunity to catch them while we can.

Feature articles in TL are blind refereed by members of the advisory board. This article was submitted June 2005 and accepted November 2005.

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