

## Strategies for Successful School Librarian and Teacher Collaboration

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### ABSTRACT

*This qualitative meta-analysis explored the nature of successful collaboration between teachers and school librarians. Three action research studies of school librarians who integrated instruction or curriculum through collaboration with teachers are examined to understand more about what strategies made the collaboration successful. Strategies used by the librarians to collaborate more effectively with teachers are presented, as well as measures that can be used to determine successful collaboration. The findings indicate that the school librarians in this study used many different strategies to lead the collaboration to success. These strategies included initiating the collaboration, securing support from the principal, identifying a shared vision with all collaborators, collecting and analyzing data about the progress of the collaboration, holding regular meetings, and documenting the collaboration. This paper was presented for the AASL Research into Practice track at the 2019 AASL National Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, USA.*

### Introduction

Successful collaboration is a mark of excellence for school librarians. In today's schools, school librarians seek to integrate their instruction with other teachers to improve student achievement and to meet professional standards. Collaboration between educators has long been established as a practice that can lead to improved learning outcomes, more satisfactory job experiences, and increased student engagement in the school library (Lance et al. 2010). School librarian models of collaboration indicate that successful collaboration with teachers involves integrating instruction and curriculum so that student learning improves. Examining the practice of successful collaboration between school librarians and teachers to understand more about what strategies can lead to successful outcomes will benefit educators and learners.

Within this context, school librarians and teachers are engaged in efforts to collaborate at various levels to increase student achievement and be more effective teachers. Some of these efforts include co-teaching or supplementing an existing content-area lesson with library instruction. Patricia Montiel-Overall explained that collaboration itself is a critical strategy that educators can use to resolve issues (2005b). Montiel-Overall provided a model of collaboration for teachers and school librarians that includes levels of progressively greater depth of collaboration: coordination, cooperation/partnership, integrated instruction, and integrated curriculum. Collaboration at all of these levels can happen with teachers from any content area. Previous literature related to collaboration between school librarians and teachers has examined opportunities to collaborate in various content areas, including reading (Moreillon 2013; Reed and Oslund 2018), STEM (Mardis 2006; Mardis and Hoffman 2007) and social studies (Latham et al. 2013). Sarah Cray suggested that school librarians will enhance most content areas with instruction in information literacy when provided the opportunity to collaborate (2019).

While the body of literature related to school and librarian collaboration is vast, little research has been done to examine the collaborative strategies used by school librarians that lead to successful collaboration. Further, successful collaboration may be cultural and vary within each unique school environment. Many barriers (for example, time to collaborate) prohibit collaboration from happening, and successful strategies are needed to overcome these barriers (Rawson 2014; Copeland and Jacobs 2017). Don Latham also explained that collaboration is desirable, yet hard to achieve in practice (2013). Further research into the strategies that school librarians use to create and work within effective collaborative relationships is needed to understand more about making collaboration work.

Through the documented experience of three school librarians who organized and led collaborative efforts in their schools, this qualitative meta-analysis explores the practice of collaboration within an elementary, a middle, and a high school library to understand more about what strategies made the collaboration successful. Each action research study examined in this paper describes a successfully completed collaborative project using integrated instruction or curriculum, and together these projects are analyzed within the context of “what strategies make collaboration successful?”

## Literature Review

### DEFINITION OF COLLABORATION

Collaboration is a strategy that is used in many disciplines to produce greater benefits than can be accomplished alone. For example, in business, collaboration is recognized as a strategy that can increase production and create value while also supporting the individual needs of each member of the collaboration (Donahue 1989). In schools, collaboration between teachers also brings benefits to the school and to learners. Teachers who collaborate are more motivated, have a decreased workload, and are able to make more-efficient and better connections in the curriculum (Vangrieken et al. 2015). Educators in schools are expected to be good at collaboration so that they can effectively do their jobs.

School librarians consider collaboration to be one of their main roles. The school librarian is an instructional partner who collaborates with other educators to support student achievement and success within and outside of the school library (AASL 2018). In addition, Collaborate is one of the Shared Foundations in AASL’s *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* (AASL 2018). Through three integrated frameworks, the

standards encourage school librarians to promote collaborative opportunities among their students, as well as work with other teachers and administrators to solve problems and make connections with other content areas in the school.

Judith Warren Little explained that, at one point, one of the criticisms of collaboration in schools was that it lacked conceptual clarity (1990). The difference between working in teams or groups and actual collaboration was established by understanding more about the depth of collaboration that happens between educators. Montiel-Overall developed the Teacher and Librarian Collaboration (TLC) model, which identified four common practices for teacher and school librarian collaboration, each of which requires more commitment and greater investment. These practices are: coordination, cooperation, integrated instruction, and integrated curriculum (2005a; 2005b). Coordination requires less commitment and time between educators as they work together to accomplish tasks. Educators who cooperate are working together to accomplish similar goals, requiring more commitment than coordination, but less than if they were integrating instruction. When educators integrate instruction, they work as equal partners and share instructional responsibility. Educators may use co-planning, co-implementing, or co-evaluating to implement instruction for one course or lesson. Educators who integrate instruction across an entire curriculum are collaborating to “integrate curriculum.” Integrated curriculum often must be supported by the principal so that teachers and librarians can have the time and commitment needed to integrate standards across the curriculum to support student learning. Montiel-Overall explained that to successfully collaborate, teachers and librarians must engage as equal partners who integrate instruction or curriculum to work towards shared goals to improve student outcomes (2005a). The TLC model is often used as a framework for teacher and school librarian collaboration. Therefore, this paper uses Montiel-Overall’s definition of collaboration as a guide.

Collaboration is a trusting, working relationship between two or more equal participants involved in shared thinking, shared planning and shared creation of integrated instruction. Through a shared vision and shared objectives, student learning opportunities are created that integrate subject content and information literacy by co-planning, co-implementing, and co-evaluating students’ progress throughout the instructional process in order to improve student learning in all areas of the curriculum. (Montiel-Overall 2005a, Section A, para. 9)

## SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

While integrated instruction or curriculum involving the school library and a content-area classroom is a desirable outcome, there are often many barriers to accomplishing this. School librarians often understand the value of collaboration but may find in practice that teachers are resistant to working with a school librarian for various reasons. For example, Latham, Gross, and Witte explained that a teacher in a content area finds it easier to reach goals by working alone rather than with the school librarian, or a teacher may not fully understand the role of the school librarian (2013). Teachers may also experience many conflicts and dilemmas that impact collaborative activity, including policies within the school that impact curriculum, workload, and other instructional demands (Eri and Pihl 2016). Despite these known barriers, school librarians must find strategies that will work for supporting collaboration with content-area teachers.

Many factors may influence the success of collaboration. Paul Mattesich and Kirsten Johnson identified twenty-two factors that influence successful collaboration and cluster into six categories: environment, membership characteristics, process and structure, communication,

purpose, and resources (2018); see table 1. Ken Haycock explained that in school libraries, many of these elements, like environment, process and structure, and resources, are out of the control of the school librarian and are impacted by administrative decisions and policies. For example, administrators can foster a collaborative environment by ensuring that all teachers receive professional development on collaboration, as well as scheduling time for teachers to collaborate (2007). Haycock also explained that structure constraints, like fixed schedules, can make it hard to collaborate and force teachers to collaborate after or before school, on weekends, or on days off. Successful collaboration is also impacted by the resources (including time, skills, and funding) available to the collaborative team. However, school librarians and teachers can control their commitment to the collaboration, clarifying roles within the collaboration and developing a shared vision (2007).

Table 1. Factors that lead to successful collaboration.

Categories of Successful Collaboration	Factors of Successful Collaboration
Environment	History of collaboration or cooperation in the community; collaborative group seen as a leader in the community; favorable political or social climate
Membership Characteristics	Mutual respect, understanding and trust; appropriate cross section of members; membership belief in the value of collaboration; ability to compromise
Process and Structure	Members share a stake in the process and outcome; multiple layers of decision-making; flexibility; development of clear roles and policy guidelines; adaptability; evaluation and continuous learning
Communication	Open and frequent communication; established informal and formal communication strategies
Purpose	Attainable goals and objectives; shared vision; unique purpose
Resources	Sufficient funds; skilled convener; engaged stakeholders

*Source:* Content adapted from Mattesich and Johnson 2018.

John Glaser also explained that certain attitudes lead to successful collaboration within an organization. For one, if the organization members have a shared vision and work towards the greater good of all, collaboration is more likely to succeed. Glaser also explained that administrators can align an organization around a common vision, resulting in more coherence within the organization itself (2004). James P. Spillane, Megan Hopkins, and Tracy M. Sweet also explained that investing in the development of social relationships within a school is vital for developing a culture of collaboration. In addition, special attention to the membership of teams is critical for effective collaboration. Factors like physical proximity, experience of the

group members, and teaching the same curricular material are all influential in the frequency of interactions (2015).

Successful collaborations often have at least one member who initiates, leads, manages, or is more vocal in the collaboration. Ning Li et al. described this person as an “extra-miler” in that they exhibit more behaviors that show additional work beyond that of other contributors to the collaboration. An extra miler shows more helping characteristics, as well as being more networked in the collaboration. The findings of Li et al. indicated that just one extra miler in a collaboration can have a significant influence on the outcomes of the collaboration. Though a single person with motivation to lead the collaboration can be very beneficial to successful collaboration, Li et al. cautioned that this person may also find more benefit to the collaboration than others do. Collaborations may rely on one member to be the extra miler as there may not necessarily be a leader in the collaboration (2015).

## **SUCCESSFUL TEACHER AND SCHOOL LIBRARIAN COLLABORATION**

Montiel-Overall’s Teacher and Librarian Collaboration (TLC) model can be used to measure the depth of collaboration between school librarians and teachers in different content areas. These levels explain that coordinating and cooperating on lesson planning to align resources to content is a path to collaboration, but that full collaborative potential is not attained until educators are able to integrate instruction or curriculum (2005a; 2012). The TLC model is helpful as school librarians evaluate the level of collaboration in which they are currently operating, and set goals for reaching deeper levels of collaboration.

Montiel-Overall explained that the TLC model can be used to develop lesson plans with many grade levels and in many areas such as ecology, technology, policy, or many other areas that integrate global education (2012). Within a school, collaboration between teachers and school librarians may be considered a cross-functional collaboration. A cross-functional collaboration occurs between people who seek similar goals, have relatively similar hierarchical status in an organization, but have different job functions (Robbins 2001). The benefits of cross-functional collaborations are that problems are solved more effectively, members often have more energy to employ a common solution, and the members of the collaboration are able to respond more quickly to changing environments (Glaser 2004). In schools, the school librarian is a teacher but has the unique role of also managing the library. Collaborating with a content-area teacher allows both educators to reap the benefits of a cross-functional collaboration.

Certain factors may be more essential to success than others, depending on the collaboration members and school culture. Kirsty Williamson, Alyson Archibald, and Joy McGregor suggested that shared vision was a major factor in the success of teacher and school librarian collaborations. These researchers studied teacher and school librarian collaboration to improve academic integrity in four schools and found that the collaborations that had a shared vision were the most successful. In addition, those with strong communication between members were more likely to be successful (2010). O. P. Cooper and Marty Bray reiterated that the collaboration itself is not the goal. Instead, the goal of collaboration is to develop a shared vision or goals that can be met through collaboration (2011).

For school librarians, special projects or new programs within the school are often catalysts for collaboration. Cooper and Bray explained that school librarians should be ready to participate in programs designed for instructional improvement so that librarians are part of the planning process from the beginning (2011). For example, the teacher and school librarian collaboration that occurred in Williamson, Archibald, and McGregor’s study was initiated due to a need to

solve a plagiarism concern in the district (2010). Jennifer Robins and Patricia Antrim also found that the Response to Intervention (RtI) model, a model of instruction and intervention for supporting student achievement and success, led to increased successful collaboration between teachers and school librarians when school librarians chose to take an active role in its implementation (2012). Perhaps the success was due to the frequency of collaboration that occurs when working on a project. Keith Curry Lance, Marcia J. Rodney, Bill Schwarz found that teachers and school librarians who collaborated at least once a month had the most impact on student success (2010).

Administrators' support for collaborative relationships is also important for successful collaboration. Cooper and Bray explained that the school librarian must be viewed by the administrator as a critical member of a planning team (2011). Lance, Rodney, and Schwarz also stated that the school librarian is responsible for advocating for their own position on these teams and for making administrators aware of the value added by the school librarian (2010). The school librarian can also initiate collaboration. However, as found in Li et al.'s 2015 work on collaboration in business, the person who initiates the collaboration between educators will gain the most from it (John-Steiner, Weber, and Minnis 1998; Clark et al. 1996). For example, Vera John-Steiner, Robert Weber, and Michele Minnis explained that researchers who collaborated with teachers gained more than the teacher did because the collaboration was designed with the goals of the researcher first (1998). Caroline Clark et al. recommended that collaborators use mutual empowerment strategies so that each member of the collaboration can benefit (1996).

School librarians are often responsible for communicating the role of the school librarian within their school communities. Audrey Church found that school librarians often initiated collaboration with teachers. Church also found that the principal may expect the school librarian to initiate collaboration, take initiative, and be proactive to promote library services. Principals often learn about the school librarian's role from the librarians themselves, but will usually support them as instructional partners and members of leadership teams (2010).

School librarians may be more prepared to collaborate in cross-functional teams than classroom teachers. One challenge to teacher and school librarian collaboration is that collaboration is more commonly discussed in school library preparation graduate programs than it is in teacher education programs. Latham, Gross, and Witte found that educators of school librarians were more able to identify strategies to teach collaboration than educators in content areas (2013). In addition, Judi Moreillon found that pre-service teachers were more likely to collaborate with school librarians later if the teachers had been taught how to collaborate in their graduate programs. Moreillon recommended that teacher education programs consider teaching collaborative practices with a focus on the positive impact of teacher and librarian collaboration for student achievement (2008).

Beliefs about one's ability or knowledge may also be a factor in successful collaboration. Elizabeth Bondy and Mary T. Brownell explained that teachers are influenced by their own beliefs about their ability to collaborate. Many teachers may feel comfortable collaborating in their own area of expertise but are uncomfortable collaborating outside of their content area or with other populations (1997). Marcia Mardis explained that this is true for school librarians as well. For example, many school librarians come from a humanities background and may not feel comfortable collaborating on a science project. Mardis suggested that school librarians can examine the overlap in teaching science and teaching library skills to assuage insecurities about working in that content area (2006).



## SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborating with other educators is a vital part of the work of the school librarian. Classroom teacher and school librarian collaboration can improve student outcomes in most subject areas. To fully collaborate, school librarians and teachers should work as equal partners to integrate instruction and curriculum to improve student learning. School librarians often indicate that they face many challenges when collaborating, particularly at higher levels. Looking at factors that lead to successful collaboration, such as environment, membership, process, communication, purpose, and resources, may be one way to identify strategies that work for cross-functional collaborations, like the teacher and school librarian partnership.

## Method

### QUALITATIVE META-ANALYSIS

A qualitative meta-analysis was conducted to examine the strategies that led to successful collaboration for three collaborative projects led by school librarians. Ladislav Timulak and Germain Lietaer explained that qualitative meta-analysis is one way to look at interactions that lead to a significant event (2001). The significant event in this study is successful collaboration at the level of integrating instruction or curriculum. A qualitative meta-analysis approach makes it possible to examine the findings of existing qualitative studies that investigate similar topics in diverse environments. When using a qualitative meta-analysis, R. Schreiber, D. Crooks, and P. N. Stern stated that the process consists of “the aggregating of a group of studies for the purposes of discovering the essential elements and translating the results into an end product that transforms the original results into a new conceptualization” (1997, 314). In 2009 Timulak explained that the process of conducting a qualitative meta-analysis can contribute new knowledge to a field of study by providing a more-comprehensive picture of the topic studied (see figure 1). Qualitative meta-analysis is particularly useful for providing a description of a single phenomenon that has been researched within a group of studies.

Figure 1. Timulak’s six steps of qualitative meta-analysis (2009).

Step 1: Research Question	The topic of the meta-analysis is closely linked to the topic in the individual studies.
Step 2: Selecting Primary Studies	Primary studies are selected based on their similarities in theoretical and methodological frameworks.
Step 3: Appraisal of Primary Studies	Primary studies are coded, and re-examined for selection and for relevant features, including interpretation of the findings.
Step 4: Preparing Data	Data available in the primary study is used in the meta-analysis, as well as interaction with authors to further interpret the data.
Step 5: Data Analysis	Data is analyzed between primary studies and any additional data using a descriptive-interpretative approach.
Step 6: Credibility Checks	Credibility checks common in qualitative research, like auditing, independent analysis, triangulation, and validation by the primary researchers are employed.

## RESEARCH TEAM

The research team for this study included one lead researcher and three authors of primary studies related to school librarian and teacher collaboration. The four authors were all affiliated with the same university at one time. The authors of this paper listed first and second worked together to select the primary studies. The first author prepared and analyzed the data across the primary studies. The second, third, and fourth authors served in the role of consultants, auditors, and validators of the findings in the primary research studies.

### STEP 1: RESEARCH QUESTION

This research began with the question, “What strategies make school library and teacher collaboration successful?” This question came under exploration as the first and second author held conversations with other school librarians about collaboration within the school librarian community. Repeated questions suggested that many school librarians were aware of Montiel-Overall’s TLC model and what it means to collaborate, but were less clear about what strategies were needed to be successful at collaborating. Thus, this question became the central question for this study. The definition of successful collaboration was determined by the authors’ interpretation of the TLC model put into practice. The authors determined that “successful collaboration” meant that the school librarian was able to develop relationships and projects that could be categorized at the highest levels of Montiel-Overall’s TLC model: integrated instruction and integrated curriculum (2005a).

### STEP 2: SELECTING PRIMARY STUDIES

The goal of this research was to understand successful collaboration practices between school librarians and teachers. In a qualitative meta-analysis, the first phase of identifying studies for analysis involves establishing parameters for the search. The first and second authors determined that relevant primary studies should include:

- completion within the last two years,
- use of an action research method, and
- collaboration between school librarians and teachers at the level of integrated instruction or integrated curriculum.

Using a convenience sample, the first and second authors identified for appraisal three action research studies in which the school librarian worked with classroom teachers to integrate instruction or curriculum.

### STEP 3: APPRAISAL OF PRIMARY STUDIES

#### Overview of Characteristics

According to Timulak, after the primary studies have been selected for meta-analysis, they are then appraised for alignment to the research question, and their relevant features (such as research method, focus, or findings) are captured to ensure pertinence to the study (2009). The three primary studies finally selected were all action research projects conducted within the last two years (see table 2). Each study was conducted as part of thesis work at the same university



and within one program. The primary studies consisted of teacher and school librarian collaboration that occurred in a public school. In all three studies the collaboration was guided by the TLC model. Each primary study also consisted of a school librarian or pre-service school librarian who initiated and completed a collaborative project with at least one teacher in their building and conducted action research to determine its effectiveness. The school librarians (n=2) and pre-service school librarian (n=1) involved in the collaborations were from various levels of schools, including one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. The school librarians collaborated with different types of teachers, including an English Language Learning (ELL) teacher, a history teacher, and elementary grade-level teachers.

Table 2. Characteristics of primary studies analyzed.

Primary Study	Problem Studied	Intervention Type	Result of Intervention	Number of Participants
Elementary	Depth of collaboration	Professional development	Integrated curriculum	10 teachers; 1 school librarian
Middle	Student engagement	Consultation	Integrated instruction	1 teacher; 1 pre-service school librarian
High	Exclusion of underrepresented group	Consultation	Integrated curriculum	1 teacher, 1 school librarian, 14 students

### Primary Study 1 (King 2019)

The school librarian of an elementary school in a large urban area in Missouri collaborated with teachers from three grade levels. The goals of the action research study were to develop a culture of collaboration between teachers and the school librarian, and to collaborate at deeper levels within the school.

### Primary Study 2 (Koeberl 2019)

A pre-service school librarian in a rural area of Missouri collaborated with a history teacher at a middle school to redesign one lesson. The pre-service school librarian liaised between the supervising school librarian and the history teacher. The goals of the action research study were to increase engagement in one lesson. The teaching strategy selected in the collaboration was to integrate picture books into the lesson.

### Primary Study 3 (Donahay 2019)

A school librarian at a high school in a suburban area of Missouri collaborated with an ELL teacher to identify barriers for ELL students in accessing the library. The collaboration led to

integrated curriculum that included co-teaching, co-evaluation, and realignment of policies to support ELL students' access to the library.

#### STEP 4: PREPARING DATA

A qualitative meta-analysis must use all contextual data available from the primary studies, as well as findings from within the study. In addition, more data can be gathered from the authors of the primary studies to further understand the study, including raw data or new data collected for the purpose of the meta-analysis (Timulak 2009). For this particular study, the first author worked with the primary studies' authors (the coauthors of this paper) to identify relevant data from the primary studies, and also collected new data to explain the findings of the primary studies. The data collected for the qualitative meta-analysis included:

- narrative descriptions written by the school librarians who had led the collaboration and the teachers they worked with, and
- an analysis of the evidence collected by each school librarian during the collaboration; this evidence included surveys, interviews, assessments, focus group transcripts, and completed reports on the collaboration (see table 3).

The narrative interviews used in this study were collected through e-mail after the collaborations were complete. In the written narratives, school librarians and teachers were asked to reflect on what made the collaboration successful. Authors of the primary studies and at least one of their collaborating teachers were asked, "What made this collaboration successful? What was unsuccessful?" Narrative interviews were collected by means of e-mail to respect the value of the participants' time and their busy schedules.

Table 3. Data collection.

Primary Study	Sources of Evidence	Total Pages
Elementary	Focus group transcripts, survey results, collaboration plan, narrative interviews	103
Middle	Student survey results, observation data, pre- and post-test results, narrative interviews	73
High	Student work, pre- and post-survey results, observation notes, collaboration meeting notes, narrative interviews	122

#### STEP 5: DATA ANALYSIS

A flexible qualitative analysis is used in qualitative meta-analysis to analyze the selected primary studies. Often, the analysis will include both hermeneutic and dialectic strategies to compare and contrast them (Timulak 2009). This particular study used Timulak's descriptive-interpretive approach (2001; 2009). A descriptive-interpretive approach to a qualitative meta-analysis involves four steps:

- 1) Domains are developed to represent the conceptual framework employed by the researcher.
- 2) Meaning units are delineated.
- 3) Meaning units are compared and categories are generated.
- 4) The main findings are determined.

Several different procedures were used for data analysis in this study to identify strategies that led to successful collaboration. Montiel-Overall identified integrated instruction and integrated curriculum as most empowering for educators and having the most impact on students (2005a). In the context of those domains, Mattesich and Johnson's (2018) six categories and twenty-two factors of successful collaboration were used in this part of the analysis to guide interpretive readings of each primary study. These factors were chosen because they had been used in Haycock's 2007 paper on school librarian and teacher collaboration. The analysis for this study consisted of three phases:

- 1) an examination of the school librarian's felt experience related to the success of the collaboration,
- 2) a description of events in which collaboration was positively described, and
- 3) identification of episodes that might be considered to be significant to the collaboration within the established domain.

## STEP 6: CREDIBILITY CHECKS

The final step of a qualitative meta-analysis is to conduct credibility checks to ensure the quality of the research (Timulak 2009). Methods of credibility common in qualitative research were used in this study, including triangulation, auditing, and validation by the primary researchers. To triangulate sources, the primary studies were compared with the additional data collected. The second author served as an auditor for the paper, checking the paper for bias and also identifying alternative approaches to data analysis. The authors of the primary studies (second-, third-, and fourth-listed authors of this paper) were invited to comment on the paper, as well as to validate the interpretation of the findings.

## Findings

### SCHOOL LIBRARIANS' FELT EXPERIENCES ABOUT THE COLLABORATION

The narrative interviews with the school librarians and teachers involved in the primary studies were used to inform the understanding about how those involved in the collaboration felt about the collaboration based on how they remembered it.

The first quality common between the narratives was expressions of *mutual respect* for their collaborators. Every school librarian said that the collaboration was successful because of the positive working relationship they had with their collaborators. One described it as successful because "I had a motivated and engaged collaborative partner" and another said that "we had a good relationship." Another explained that the teachers in the collaboration were motivated and made the time to collaborate.

The second common quality between the school librarians was related to *flexibility*. Flexibility was expressed in the terms of overcoming obstacles. For example, the school librarians explained that they had to address many challenges during the collaboration, including finding time to collaborate, learning more about the content area, and explaining the school librarian's role. Each school librarian expressed that overcoming obstacles was hard, and indicated that collaboration had to happen during time found outside of the regular workday. One said that some of the challenges included “a lack of dedicated time devoted to collaboration, testing schedules or school requirements that conflict with time to collaborate and co-teach, and even proximity obstacles in a large school (not having rooms near one another, etc.)”

## POSITIVE DESCRIPTIONS OF COLLABORATION

Each primary study was analyzed for evidence of positive collaborative moments as described within the study. Two main categories were established, with seven themes identified that were mutually exclusive between all the studies.

### Meaning to Educators

The first main category was related to the meaning of the collaboration for the educators involved. Within this category, five mutually exclusive themes described the experiences of participating in the collaboration.

The theme *role of the librarian* encompassed the school librarian's feelings that once their role was understood by the teachers they were collaborating with, the collaboration was able to reach deeper levels and encouraged sustainability of the collaboration for the future. Examples include:

“The teacher realized that the librarian can not only help with finding resources, but could also help with ideas on how to engage students in new ways.”

“Once they learned more about school library standards, they realized the school librarian did more than just check out books.”

The theme *value of relationships* encompassed the relevance that the primary study authors placed on established relationships, as well as developing new relationships with their collaborators. Examples include:

“Once teachers realize how valuable a librarian can be, they will be more apt to collaborate another time.”

“It is abundantly clear from this study that the importance of relationships is key to promoting collaboration.”

The theme *shared knowledge* captured the phenomenon of educators pooling standards and practices together during the collaboration. In one collaboration, the school librarian introduced the *AASL Standards Integrated Framework* (AASL 2018) to teachers, and the collaborating teacher introduced a major pedagogical theory used in their classroom. Both theories were incorporated into the collaboration. Another example in this category is that, from the perspective of the school librarian, the content-area teacher often demonstrated more familiarity with students and curriculum and could provide additional insights that a school librarian may not have. One author explained that the content-area teacher had additional insight into the barriers that the students experienced with library access. On the reverse side, the authors also wrote about the knowledge the school librarian brought to the collaboration. One example was,

“Collaboration also helped the ELL teacher to become more informed and educated about the school library resources and how to help students access them.” Another explained that the school librarian can offer a broad perspective because they work with the whole school: “One of the most beneficial things about librarians is that they are familiar with all of the curriculum in their school.”

The theme *awareness as a catalyst* represented the changes that teachers went through as they learned more about the school librarian’s role. Specifically, one author wrote that the collaboration planning process was a catalyst for change. They said, “The collaboration plan was essential for changing teachers’ feelings about collaboration.” Another author suggested that the collaboration led to a transformation for the teacher in the collaboration, stating, “Many teachers do not realize the advantages of collaborating with the librarian to enhance the curriculum.”

The theme *overcoming challenges* conceptualizes barriers to making the collaboration happen as described by the teachers and school librarians, but also finding ways to overcome them. Though the collaborations in these studies were successful in that they met their goals of integrating instruction or curriculum, achieving this success was not easy. For all three authors, finding the time to collaborate was problematic. One author wrote, “When asked what would make collaboration happen more frequently, one teacher stated, ‘Time’.” In this same study “time” was mentioned over fifty times by teachers in survey responses and focus group results. Another author wrote, “Since built-in collaboration time at the study school is both regulated by the district guidelines and department specific, teacher [planning] time had to be utilized.” Another author explained in the narrative interviews that many teachers were not able to participate in collaboration because they lacked the time. In addition, time to do the co-teaching was also hard to find with only limited schedule flexibility allowed by the institutions.

### Meaning to Students

The second main category found in the analysis was related to what the collaboration meant to students. The authors discussed how the collaboration led to (or could lead to) *increased achievement* for students. Two of the primary studies measured the impact on student achievement and found that student engagement increased as a result of the strategies implemented during the collaboration. In another study, the author explained that once the teachers understood how the school librarian and teachers could collaborate, they felt like it had great potential to increase student outcomes. The author wrote, “Once [teachers] knew more about it, they had more ideas for ways in which they could work with the school librarian. They also felt like collaborating with the school librarian could benefit students.”

The collaborations also led to *reduced barriers* related to students’ accessing library resources. In one collaboration, the focus was on identifying barriers and reducing them. The collaboration was successful in that students began to use the school library more as a result of the strategies incorporated after the collaboration. The author wrote, “The largest gains for ELL students that emerged from ELL teacher-librarian collaboration were in the areas of physical and digital library access.”

### CRITICAL EPISODES DURING THE COLLABORATION

To understand more about the strategies that led to the success of these collaborations, critical episodes that occurred during the collaborations were identified and sorted within the context of Mattesich and Johnson’s (2018) twenty-two factors supporting successful collaboration. This

inventory approach made it possible to understand more about actions involved in the collaborations that were critical to success. An action critical to success may include actions taken by the collaborators (like making time to collaborate outside of school hours) or factors that already exist within the school culture or environment that made it possible for the collaboration to be successful. For example, one school in this study had previously signed the pledge to be a Future Ready School, which involves developing a culture of collaboration within the school (Alliance for Excellent Education 2015). In a teacher and school librarian collaboration, many of the factors identified by Mattesich and Johnson are not within the control of the educators, such as environment, process, structure, or resources. Not all of Mattesich and Johnson's factors were present in all studies, and some factors could not be determined within the constraints of the research method used.

In primary study 1 at an elementary school (King 2019), the school librarian gathered groups of teachers from each grade level to discuss how they could collaborate (see table 4). The collaboration included an information session about how teachers and school librarians can collaborate at higher levels. Together they built collaborative plans that identified shared goals and student learning outcomes. For the study, the school librarian also measured changes in teacher attitudes about collaboration with the school librarian.

Table 4. An inventory of critical episodes during the collaboration in primary study 1: elementary school (King 2019).

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Critical Episode</b>
Environment	All of the educators in the collaboration had worked at the school the same number of years. The school is a Future Ready School. Informal collaborative efforts have been implemented in the past. The school librarian provided information about teacher and school librarian collaboration to the teachers in the collaboration. The principal approved the study.
Membership Characteristics	The teachers in the collaboration had a range of experience. All grade-level teachers participated together in group collaboration led by the school librarian. The collaborators identified shared goals.
Process and Structure	The school librarian is on a fixed schedule. The school librarian and teachers do not share planning time. The collaborative group was flexible in determining how to collaborate. A collaboration plan was developed to guide the collaboration and evaluation.
Communication	The collaborators had established informal relationships.
Purpose	The collaborators aligned content-area standards with library standards. The collaborators identified successful outcomes for students.



<b>Factors</b>	<b>Critical Episode</b>
Resources	The collaborators found time to meet outside of the regular school day. The school librarian led and initiated the collaboration.

The collaboration explored in primary study 2 (Koeberl 2019) occurred at a middle school between a pre-service school librarian, a history teacher, and a supervising school librarian (see table 5). The collaboration was informal, and the teacher and pre-service librarian worked together to redesign a lesson with the shared vision of engaging students. The teaching strategy selected was to incorporate picture books into an existing lesson on Egypt. The findings indicated that the strategy was successful in that students showed more interest, and increased discussion and time on task. The pre-service school librarian liaised between the school librarian and the history teacher, and curated resources from several libraries to use during the collaboration.

Table 5. An inventory of critical episodes during the collaboration in primary study 2: middle school (Koeberl 2019).

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Critical Episode</b>
Environment	The school did not have a history of collaboration. The teacher had never collaborated with a school librarian before. The principal approved the study.
Membership Characteristics	Both educators in the collaboration were highly experienced in the content area. The pre-service librarian liaised between the librarian and the teacher in the collaboration. The collaborators already had an established relationship.
Process and Structure	The middle and high school libraries were in one facility. The strategy that resulted from the collaboration had to be revised midway through the project. The teaching strategy was developed through the collaboration and taught by the teacher.
Communication	All collaboration happened through informal communication. Collaborators communicated as needed based on responses from students to the implemented strategies.
Purpose	A shared vision to engage students was developed.
Resources	The school librarian initiated the collaboration. The school librarian sought several teachers for collaboration but only one chose to participate. The goals of the collaboration (integrate picture books) extended outside of the library's holdings. Public library resources were utilized to complete the collaboration.

The collaboration involved in primary study 3 (Donahay 2019) occurred between a school librarian and ELL teacher at a high school (see table 6). The collaborators met frequently for an extended period of time. Together they developed a plan to identify barriers to library access for ELL students, and solve them. Data collection from students indicated that their strategies (integrating curriculum) worked and student access increased.

Table 6. An inventory of critical episodes during the collaboration in primary study 3: high school (Donahay 2019).

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Critical Episode</b>
Environment	The school in the study serves all students who need ELL services, regardless of where they reside within district boundaries. This was the first collaboration for the librarian and ELL teacher. The school had an established history of collaboration. The principal approved the study.
Membership Characteristics	The school librarian tried to engage teachers from other buildings. The collaboration included feedback from the teacher and students about the problem under investigation.
Process and Structure	All collaborators were involved in student evaluation. The collaborators did not share planning time and had to find time to meet.
Communication	The collaborators engaged in frequent, formal communication.
Purpose	The collaborators identified the problem and solutions together as part of the collaboration.
Resources	The library location was hard to access for ELL students and teachers. The school librarian initiated the collaboration. The school librarian conducted personal research to understand more about the content area.

## Discussion

### INTRODUCTION

This study explored three examples of collaboration between a teacher and school librarian to understand more about what strategies made it successful. The findings indicated that the factors of successful collaboration aligned with Mattesich and Johnson's categories of successful collaboration (2018), though not necessarily in the same way. Each collaboration was unique and was influenced by different factors for success. For example, while two primary studies (1 and 3) used more-formal meeting formats, another (primary study 2) relied more on the established relationship that had already been developed between the educators. Or, while one collaboration started with a specific idea for collaboration, the others developed ideas as part of the

collaboration. Several characteristics of the school librarians doing the research for the primary studies were similar across all of the collaborations:

- They all collected data and assessed the data throughout the collaboration.
- They all worked in collaboration teams that were highly committed to the success of the project.
- They all made efforts to learn about the content area they were working with.
- They all worked towards a shared vision.

## SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

While many of the strategies used in these studies aligned with Mattesich and Johnson's (2018) categories for successful collaboration, there were also some surprises between the studies. While Jean Donham van Deusen and Julie I. Tallman found that flexible scheduling was important for meetings in collaborations (1994), it was not essential for the teachers and school librarian in two of the primary studies (1 and 3). Participants in those collaborations were willing to meet outside of regular planning times, often using their own personal time to meet. Another interesting factor was that the collaborations often evolved throughout time. In all of the primary studies, the strategies developed during the initial planning were adapted as the collaboration evolved.

Mattesich and Johnson suggested that process and structure are important for successful collaboration (2018). However, this analysis found that the way the collaboration was structured was unique for each collaboration. Two collaborative groups (primary studies 1 and 3) used formal collaboration plans and identified targeted areas of collaboration after each meeting. One collaboration (primary study 2, where the relationship had already been developed after years of working together) did not use a formal collaboration plan. Instead, the educators in the collaboration used informal methods of meeting and planning the collaboration as they interacted daily.

Insecurities about a content area is one reason that school librarians are less apt to collaborate with classroom teachers. Marcia Mardis explained that school librarians are more comfortable collaborating in areas they are familiar with but can learn about new areas and how information literacy can support those areas (2006). While school librarians may prefer to collaborate in content areas with which they have experience and knowledge, several of the school librarians in the primary studies examined here took time to learn more about new content areas and the collaborative process while they were engaged in collaboration. In addition, throughout the collaborations the school librarians educated the teachers on library standards and the role of the librarian. Because of this personal investment in continued learning, the school librarians were able to identify areas in which they could enhance an existing lesson and defined that area as part of the collaboration. It could also be assumed that the school librarians in this study were motivated by the thesis requirement in their education specialist degrees to conduct these collaborations at the highest level, though the authors and their collaborators indicated in their narrative interviews that improving student success and other intrinsic motivators were the main reasons they were motivated to invest in the collaboration.

One of the schools in this study (primary study 3) had an established history of collaboration. Barbara Immroth and W. Bernard Lukenbill found that such a history was an important factor for successful collaboration (2007). However, not all of the collaborations in this study were at

schools that had this advantage. Two schools (locations for primary studies 1 and 2) were in the process of developing a collaborative culture, and the collaborations reported here were among the first formal efforts between the school librarian and classroom teachers. Their success indicates that even if a school does not already have an established history of collaboration, creating a culture of collaboration might be possible if other factors for successful collaboration are in place. Similarly, one of the collaborations in this study (primary study 2) began because the educators already had a history of collaborating in other ways. While having an established relationship is helpful for collaborating, it is not always possible. However, in this school, the collaboration studied was one of the first librarian and teacher collaborations to occur. Starting with a willing participant was especially effective, and the school librarian is hopeful the success will lead to additional collaborations with other educators.

Lois D. Wine explained that collaboration between educators, primarily in the areas of technology, requires the establishment of clear roles (2016). Mattesich and Johnson also identified role definition as one of the factors of success (2018). In this analysis, all of the collaborators in the primary studies had clearly defined roles. The collaboration teams were fairly small, including at minimum one content-area teacher and one school librarian. Within these teams, the school librarians clearly explained the library standards that guided their work, and the content-area teachers were also able to articulate the standards they wanted to help learners meet. The school librarians each determined and implemented lessons, activities, and ideas for meeting these standards within the school library. This finding is also an example of the success of shared vision. Both parties were working towards improving learning for students to help them meet the standards. Williamson, Archibald, and McGregor also found shared vision to be the primary factor in the success of teacher and school library collaboration (2010). Shared vision was certainly present in the cases in this study.

The collaborations in all three studies were librarian-led with approval from the principal. For all of the collaborations in this study, the school librarian played the role of the “extra-miler” by initiating the collaboration and ensuring the collaboration was successful. Li et al. explained that this role has great responsibility as it takes on more tasks and mental load (2015). If left unnurtured, this responsibility can lead to collaborative overload for the extra miler (Cross, Rebele, and Grant 2015). In relation to this study, if the school librarian is always leading the collaboration or involved in too many in-depth collaborations, they may be at risk of collaboration overload. In addition, most of the collaboration planning time happened outside of regular school hours, a circumstance that may be unsustainable for continued collaboration.

Though the critical episodes of collaboration in this study aligned with Mattesich and Johnson’s (2018) factors for successful collaboration, not all of those factors seemed to be essential for the success of the collaborations in this study. For example, one of Mattesich and Johnson’s recommendations is to include multiple layers of decision-making, including all levels of management and administration. While this use of multiple layers of decision-making is effective for a business, schools do not operate in this way, and collaborations can still be successful for students with little oversight from administration. However, it was critical that the administration at all of these schools was aware of the collaboration and had interacted with the school librarian about the details of the collaboration, including allowing time for collaboration, supporting the effort, and encouraging participation.

## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

The school librarians in these studies used many strategies to guide the collaboration successfully. As the initiator of the collaboration, each first sought administrator approval, which has been identified as a key factor in success for collaboration. They also worked with the other educators to develop a shared vision and used data as a guide for understanding how the collaboration was working. They drew on existing working relationships with educators, and developed new relationships. They explained the role of the librarian and library standards, and also took time to learn the standards and content for the content area in which they were working.

The collaborations in these cases fit nicely into Mattesich and Johnson's categories for successful collaboration (2018). It may be concluded that the intensity of collaborating at the levels of integrated instruction and curriculum demands that these factors are present. However, as noted earlier, many of these factors are out of the control of the school librarian and teachers, requiring creative solutions and flexibility to make collaboration possible. In the primary study at the high school, the school librarian took the time to learn the pedagogical strategies of the content area in which they were working. The school librarian did not have a background in ELL instruction, so they read articles and books on culturally responsive pedagogy and sheltered instruction. They took these actions to learn more about the content area and develop their own competence. The pre-service school librarian in the primary study at the middle school had a background in the content area in which they collaborated. They had actually taught the lesson before so had ideas for integrating library standards and practices to improve engagement. In addition, they were able to select and retrieve well-aligned picture books to complement the lesson because of this prior experience.

One other strategy that worked well for the primary studies at the elementary and high school (1 and 3) was to use a collaboration plan. Moreillon provided lesson plans to accompany the 2013 book on co-teaching. Those collaboration plans served as a guide for both school librarians who were able to identify the shared standards that they would work towards with the teachers. In addition, the collaboration plan served as a shared document that all educators in the collaboration were able to reference.

Finally, the other strategy used by each of the school librarians in this study was to collect data throughout the collaboration. In primary study 1 at the elementary school, the school librarian collected data from the teachers they collaborated with to understand more about their perceptions of the collaboration and how it could lead to better collaboration in the future. They used this data to guide the collaboration meetings. In primary study 2 at the middle school, the pre-service school librarian collected data from students to understand more about their preferred learning strategies and also to assess the impact of the picture book intervention. In primary study 3 at the high school, the school librarian and ELL teacher developed a survey together to understand more about where the barriers for ELL students' library use were, and then used that data to try to reduce or eliminate the barriers. The data served as a starting point for the collaboration and also provided metrics for understanding its success.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

One of the lessons learned in this study is that many content-area teachers are not familiar with the role of the school librarian. Librarians can explain their role to other educators and suggest ways to collaborate. Church also explained that school librarians are often the initiators of

collaboration, and can also impact principals' perceptions of the role of a school librarian (2010). The school librarians who led collaborations in this study all took time to discuss the school librarian's role with both the principal and the teacher(s) involved in the collaboration. One even provided a handout that explained how teachers and school librarians can collaborate. As discovered in the primary study at the elementary school, once the teachers knew more about the role of the school librarian, they were easily able to understand how collaboration could occur that would improve student outcomes.

School librarians should consider learning about the teaching strategies and content-area standards in the content area in which they will collaborate. Each content area has a unique set of teaching strategies, assumptions, and standards that are not well known to those outside of the area. Becoming familiar with information from the discipline can build rapport with the content-area teacher, and help the school librarian to feel more confident in the collaboration—ultimately benefitting students.

School librarians should consider using collaboration planning templates when working with teachers. A collaboration template can help to document the goals, strategies, and process for collaboration and ensure that all individuals have an understanding of the collaboration and their roles. In addition, the collaborative template can serve as a record for future collaborations, or when the lesson must be revisited in future years. The template should be adaptable over time so that the lesson can be modified as needed.

School librarians should be careful of collaboration overload. Many of the school librarians and teachers in the primary studies were willing to meet outside of school hours to collaborate. However, doing this on a regular basis could lead to exhaustion and burnout. Ideally, an administration that supports collaboration and sees its benefits for learners would provide planning time for collaboration during teacher work days or through a scheduling system that supports collaboration among educators. In addition, collaborating at high levels with many teachers is very time intensive. School librarians should consider participating in high levels of collaboration with only a few teachers at a time.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

Much literature on collaboration between teachers and school librarians already exists. When embarking on this project, the authors wondered what new information our efforts could add to the literature to enhance what is already known about successful collaboration. However, it was quickly discovered that collaboration occurs in a unique environment within each school, within each grade, or within each content area, and that more studies in various environments are critical for improving practice. In addition, longer studies about the sustained practice of collaboration are necessary to understand the impact of collaboration through an extended period. Studies that examine collaboration throughout a school year and through a student's experience within a school could enrich what is known about collaboration.

The benefits of collaboration to students, teachers, and school librarians professionally and personally are well-established, though more research into the long-term sustainability of collaborations is needed. In school environments that are taxing and demanding, cross-functional collaboration offers many personal rewards such as working with a team and approaching problems through varied perspectives. In addition, good collaboration means that teachers and school librarians work together to meet shared goals—in essence creating a partnership. It is well-established that work partnerships can improve job satisfaction. More research into the



impact of collaboration on job satisfaction for teachers and school librarians should be conducted to understand this aspect of collaborating.

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