

GECD SB and University of Windsor Collaborative Inquiry Project

Coronation Public School

Team Members: Teresa Hoffman Sartor; Classroom Teachers of Coronation PS

University of Windsor Support: Dragana Martinovic and Atinuke Adeyemi

GECD SB Support: Irene Hartley and Sharon Seslija

Inquiry Focus:

We examined the impact of various ways of eliciting collaboration between the teacher-librarian and classroom teacher and how that impacts the attitudes and willingness of classroom teachers to collaborate with the teacher-librarian.

Inquiry Questions:

What is the impact of creating:

- (a) An inviting, accessible learning commons space, and
- (b) Opportunities for collaboration, on classroom teachers' willingness to partner with the teacher-librarian?

What impact does the teacher librarian/classroom teacher partnership have on student achievement of information library skills?

Vision – Preferred Future:

This project was conducted in hope that teachers will request partner time in the library. It was unclear how to expect teachers to enter into partnership with a teacher-librarian if they never saw it in action. This was the first year of a teacher-librarian with partnership time embedded into the timetable for some of the teachers. Many teachers had never partnered with a teacher-librarian. The library environment was in need of some TLC and the teacher-librarian spent time organizing and ordering materials as well as increasing the aesthetics of the library. In order to assess the effectiveness of these efforts, the teacher-librarian conducted a survey with 12 teachers from the school

which is 100% of the homeroom teachers currently at the school. (See Appendix A for the list of survey questions).

Theory of Action (If... then...):

If the teacher-librarian creates an inviting, accessible school library learning commons, then teachers and students will access the space, the resources and the teacher-librarian more often.

If the teacher-librarian creates opportunities then the classroom teachers will collaborate with the teacher-librarian.

If the teacher-librarian collaborates with the classroom teacher then student achievement of information literacy skills will improve.

Purpose of the Study:

Historically our school library was underused. Bulletin boards were weathered and the aesthetics lacked a visual attraction to the room. Tables and chairs were mismatched, some broken and books were not shelved in an organized manner. The non-fiction books, for example, were located in three different shelving areas of the room. The library lacked signage for staff and students to locate materials. Our learning commons area was in need of some TLC.

The purpose of the study was to invite classes to utilize the learning commons space and the materials the room provided on a more consistent basis. The teacher-librarian's approach was to create an inviting learning environment, organize books and resources, and partner with teachers and their students to educate them on the use of the library, use of technology, and provide support to include inquiry within their program. Using the teacher-librarian's expertise through the library to ensure that students gain valuable technology information, inquiry-based skills, and valuable research tools is essential for our schools today.

Justification for the study – why was this particular subject important to investigate?

School libraries have transformed themselves into learning commons. New technologies, resources and spaces to collaborate are part of the physical space. Librarians respond to the learners of today by establishing the ability of learners to make sense of the world around them. “Empowering students to learn ‘how to learn’ and to engage them in continuous self-improvement is the challenge” (Canadian Library Association, 2014, p. 4). Libraries are the most expensive classrooms in our buildings. Utilizing their physical space and providing for teacher librarians to support the inquiry learning of the 21st century is a grand opportunity that often goes missing. Promoting learning through the library is essential in today’s ever-changing world. There lies the resources and expertise needed in today’s world.

Learning commons have changed over the years in order to keep up with global learning. These vital large classrooms are no longer physical spaces that are filled with resources for research and reference. These spaces and the role the teacher-librarian has in collaborating and consulting in order to guide the learner through their learning is crucial. "School libraries are essential to the development of learning skills, provide equitable physical and intellectual access to resources and collaborate with others to provide instruction using the essential learning skills needed in the 21st century" (American Association of School Librarians, 2007, p. 3).

The role of the 21st century teacher is to support students on how to “learn how to learn” (Canadian Library Association, 2014, p. 4). We are in need of creating information literate citizens who are able to know what questions to ask and seek out answers using a variety of resources including the World Wide Web. Students need to be shown where to look for answers, distinguish good information from bad, how to translate it, and apply it. Filtering the enormous amount of information that comes forth when accessing the web is daunting if you are not taught how to properly access, retrieve, sift, and apply. “It requires more than simply asking the questions or getting the right answer. It espouses investigation, exploration, search, quest, research, pursuit, and study” (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, and Caspari, 2007, p. 2).

Students require an inquiry approach to learning within our technological global society. Students require a range of information sources that are substantiated and relevant to a problem, issue, or topic. Students no longer need to respond to a question to get the correct answer. They need to investigate and research to explore the vast amounts of information that lay in front of them. Interests become inquiry that leads to purposeful and relevant learning for the student. "Inquiry creates an environment that motivates students to learn by providing opportunities for them to construct their own meaning and develop deep understanding" (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, and Caspari, 2007, p.6).

The rate our students are transforming into technology experts via the social network is exponential. But this is limited to socializing via technology. Their days are spent on social media communicating with their peers or interacting globally. The fact that as educators we need to lead these learners to become information literate so that they may "access, evaluate, use and share information effectively and ethically for a range of educational, career and personal purposes (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 47). The role of the 21st century teacher is one a computer cannot master. Gilbert explains that the role of an educator is not only to help them find the knowledge but what to do when they get there. Students will still require important skills that need to be taught "to know good knowledge from bad knowledge, to know how to use it, to apply it, to synthesize it, to be creative with it, and to add to that the powerful role of helping them develop their communication skills, their creativity, their curiosity, their ability to work as a team, their confidence, and their self-esteem (2011, p. 24).

A new mindset is emerging of the role of the instructor. No longer do we see teachers in the front of the classroom regurgitating information that students can retrieve instantly on the World Wide Web. In this new role the teacher, according to Blair, "acts as a learning catalyst, orchestrating and facilitating activities that spark defining moments for students" (2012, p. 3). Blair provides examples of using technology as early as kindergarten in all areas of the curriculum. Students are able to play an active role in designing their own learning. They are able to initiate their question through inquiry and develop the skills to share with a global audience.

The Together for Learning document (Ontario School Library Association, 2010) is the vision of what we hope our Ontario libraries will evolve into in order to facilitate this inquiry learning. Transforming our school libraries to learning commons with the intention to prepare students for the future is a continuous journey. The ever-evolving world requires educators to find new ways of educating. Leading Learning: Standards for School Libraries in Canada (2014) is a new resource that provides direction for the implementation of a school library learning commons vision. The five core standards outlined in this document are non-hierarchical and growth indicators are used rather than levels making learning on a continuum rather than a judgment on what numbered level you are on. Leading Learning outlines the impact new technologies have on education. The eruption of digital information requires a new approach to support learning. Responding to the 21st-century learner is calling for new approaches to the library now called the learning commons. The learning commons are centres of teaching expertise which is achieved through a combination of resources, technologies, collaborative strategies, and physical and virtual learning spaces that support all learners as they evolve (Canadian Library Association, 2014).

As our Canadian educational system continues to strive to stay focused on the global perspective of educating students we are in a constant forward motion in hopes of staying current. Our systems evolve to keep up with globalization. Students' learning needs based on the technological advances is critically important to identify and find ways to keep up in order for them to be educationally prepared for their futures. The teacher-librarian and learning commons area have vital roles to play in ensuring our learners are well equipped with the right questions to ask about their learning, how to access relevant information, and how to collaborate in this global world we live in today.

We need to look at how our school learning commons and the teaching that occurs through the library can have an impact on the teachers and students who utilize these resources. Many boards in our province do not have teacher-librarians and school library commons programs – they have been cut due to budget issues. Current research indicates that collaboration between the teacher-librarians and classroom teacher does result in improved student achievement. What does that look like in our board?

Context of the Study:

Coronation Public School is located in East Windsor with a population of approximately 260 students from Kindergarten through grade 8. Our catchment area includes three Windsor geared to income housing establishments. We have a morning enriched snack program that provides a grain with fruit or vegetable each day. Students are able to access the food throughout the day within their classroom. We are also funded by several local organizations to provide outdoor clothing, hygiene supplies, backpacks, and school supplies.

Methodology (Data Collection and Analysis):

Description of changes in instructional practice

The principal, Susan Mayville, provided scheduled teacher-librarian partnering time embedded within the schedule. Teachers were made aware of this time on a regular basis via emails, signs displayed in the library, conversations with staff, and announcements during staff meetings. Creative scheduling allowed the teacher-librarian to have opportunities to work with all grade levels. The teacher-librarian in this study is qualified to teach in the library. This provided the school with a TL who was experienced and had the educational background that better enhanced the teacher/teacher-librarian partnership.

The summer of 2014 was spent changing the physical environment of the learning commons area. Furniture was arranged to provide areas where students could work in groups, signs were created to provide clear messages about how to keep materials organized, broken furniture was replaced, tired looking bulletin boards were spruced up, and new furniture was purchased. A large weeding took place in June 2014. Work orders to have broken shelves were completed and books are now organized in sections including; “everybody” books, fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels, new books, magazines, and bins of collections of books were created to help with overcrowding of shelves.

An area where staff members are able to sign-up to use the library with classes was erected. The teacher-librarian partnered with various homeroom teachers to plan a

variety of lessons including ones on; plagiarism, referencing using the MLA format, creating and sustaining literature circles, introducing Forest of Reading to the staff and individual teachers, creating and delivering inquiry based Science and Social Studies lessons and projects, use of databases, learning how to utilize Destiny for students and staff, use of online encyclopedias, and much more. The teacher-librarian was also able to provide assessment on student work and learning skills for homeroom teachers while partnerships took place. Teachers formally and informally accessed the teacher-librarian on a regular basis. Brief lessons during staff meetings and professional development days were given. Emails on how to access a range of online programs to enhance learning have been generated and sent out.

Description of what data were collected and how evidence was analyzed

A questionnaire was prepared to seek out the opinions of homeroom teachers on staff. They were asked several questions around partnering with the teacher-librarian and their view on the transformation of the learning commons space.

The questionnaire was then sent to the University of Windsor where Dragana Martinovic and Atinuke Adeyemi analyzed the data. The questionnaire's findings are found below.

Findings:

Use of library space was low in the fall and as the year progressed there was a noticeable increase in periods signed up on the wipe-off board to utilize the library. By winter, most classes were signing out books with their homeroom classes on a regular basis. Classes also sign up using the learning commons space to complete research, work on literature circles, and have performances among many other reasons.

Partnering with more than 80% of homerooms proved successful when the results of the questionnaires were tallied. The partnership between the staff and teacher-librarian is gaining momentum and the increase is noticeable. Only three out of 12 surveyed teachers worked with a teacher-librarian prior to 2014/15. This year, five teachers who had never before partnered with the teacher-librarian, worked with their teacher-

librarian. When asked what learning skills their students refined as a result of the collaboration, teachers mentioned:

- Creative/technological skills, since the students used iPads to create book trailers and develop stories. As a culminating task for the literature circle, the students created “movie trailers” for the book they had read, using iMovies. They were able to demonstrate a high level of creativity, imagination, and develop communication skills.
- Literacy skills, since the teacher-librarian assisted with the implementation and the running of the literature circle, utilizing the award winning Red Maple Books. The teacher-librarian also developed and delivered a lesson on how to “reference” properly and the pitfalls of plagiarism. The students were divided into groups and had to summarise their topic and present their findings to the class. In that way the students developed their reading, writing, and communication skills.
- There were different resources and knowledge provided to the students, who learned to search the library more effectively. They were introduced to the Destiny Library Catalogue/Virtual Library commons. These new resources extended students’ interest and motivation to read.
- Information literacy skills (e.g., creating good research questions). The students were re-introduced to school based data bases which they utilized for a variety of projects. This allowed them to develop their research skills since they can now use the online databases to support inquiry learning.

Students appeared to have gained variety of skills through the projects and activities they were involved in. The skills included communication, information literacy, creativity through technology, and research.

The teachers listed the following benefits to their students’ partnering with the teacher-librarian:

- Having access to the vast knowledge base of the teacher-librarian and extra teacher hand; becoming more informed of the resources and books, and how to locate them; strengthening literacy/language skills; becoming aware of learning opportunities at home and at school to supplement learning interest and goals; increasing ability to independently research; learning about research skills and about plagiarism, referencing, cyber safety, and ethical use of information; understanding the layout/organisation of the books/resources; learning about new books arrivals; knowing that the librarian is approachable; having another teacher to develop positive relationship with, more materials available, and enjoyable place for reading.

This increased knowledge base will assist students in various ways. However, the following benefits of partnering with the teacher-librarian were mentioned for the teachers: Assisting with planning, time sharing, knowledgeably answering questions that might arise; helping and providing support as necessary; becoming more informed of the current resources available that would support collaborative inquiries; having another set of hands/eyes that enable different activities that a single teacher cannot do, sharing ideas; showing new literacy activities, brainstorming ideas, collaborating with colleagues at grade levels, and team teaching; and collaborating in instructional design—linking curriculum process, skills, and resources (books, lesson plans).

The teachers noted that the virtual library was unexamined prior to this year, and that the increased and refined level of curriculum-based knowledge was brought along with peer project development and collaboration, as a result of this partnership. When asked to what extent the changes to the physical environment of the learning commons impacted their wish to use it, the teachers enthusiastically provided answers that were close to “Greatly” (see Table 1).

Table 1

Answers to the question: “How has the change to the physical environment of the learning commons impacted your wish to use the learning commons?”

Scale: not at all (1); somewhat (2); greatly (3)	Average (<i>N</i> = 12)
Cleanliness of room	2.7
Brightening of environment	2.8
Reorganization of resources	2.8
Ordering of new resources	2.9
Teacher sign-out calendar	2.8
Bulletin boards, displays posters	2.8
Staff work area	2.5

The teachers explained that now, the library is very clean and spacious, aesthetically pleasing; there are more lovely books/resources; it provides a quiet place for groups to read, practice drama; it is more inviting, more conducive for reading. Books are ordered based of kids’ interests—“students in my class are always eager to sign out fascinating materials”.

The library was used more, since its availability was better promoted and easier to access and it is promoted. It provides an engaging space for large groups and small groups, and book browsing.

Some challenges for teachers and students to partnering with the teacher-librarian were seen in the fact that the teacher-librarian is also a school vice-principal, and therefore not always available. Finding time to plan activities and just meet during the day was a challenge. While the challenges of timetable and scheduling were acknowledged by all teachers, they were open to find ways to meet and to sign up for the slots when the teacher-librarian is available. All teachers who did partner with the teacher-librarian this year stated that they are inclined to partner with the teacher-librarian also next school

year. They mentioned that this year they had a very positive experience and that the students also benefited greatly from this partnership. The knowledge and expertise of the teacher-librarian were extremely helpful for the students in accessing the information and resources they needed. The teacher-librarian provided classroom teachers with resources and tools that were immediately implemented in the classroom. One teacher wrote: “The tasks that my students participated in were better! [They required] deeper/higher level thinking.”

The teachers also felt that they improved their understanding of how technology can be used to assist learning and that this partnership would provide further connections between colleagues and students and deepen learning. Once they became familiar with the teacher-librarian and the teacher-librarian became familiar with teacher’s methods of instruction, partnership becomes easier.

One teacher wrote: “I wish I had done more with the teacher-librarian,” while another teacher stated: “I continue to use what I've learned from my teacher-librarian to develop how I deliver my lessons! [There is noted] a huge improvement in library set up, cleanliness, efficiency, and access of material from last few years.”

Recommendations

Utilizing the six “C’s” as a format within the partnership would relate to our SIPSA even more. Character education, citizenship, communication, critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, and creativity and imagination could be our foci next school year. Ensuring that partnerships between the teacher-librarian and teachers for next year are essential for this momentum to continue. Through formal and informal discussions and results from a technology study indicate:

- The “lunch and learn” format to increase teacher knowledge of the use of technology to enhance student learning
- A continuation of informal and formal planning time with teacher-librarian and teacher

- Continuation of the use of teacher-librarian's expertise in inquiry-based learning, use of technology, and support to teach literacy skills through the library.

Conclusions

With next year fast approaching the momentum must continue at Coronation Public School. This inquiry project has enabled teachers to utilize the strengths a teacher-librarian provides within the school which enhances student literacy skills. Students have utilized many of the skills acquired through the partnership between teacher and teacher-librarian this school year.

References

American Association of School Librarians (AASL). (2007). *Standards for the 21st century learner*. Retrieved from:
http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/guidelinesandstandards/learningstandards/AASL_Learning_Standards_2007.pdf

Blair, N. (2012). *Technology integration for the new 21st century learner*. Principal, 91(3), 8-13.

Canadian Library Association (CLA). (2014). *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*. Retrieved from
<http://clatoolbox.ca/casl/slic/lisop.pdf>

Darrow, R. (2009). *School libraries are essential*. Knowledge Quest, 37(5), 78-83.

Gilbert, I. (2011). *Why Do I Need a Teacher When I've got Google? : The Essential Guide to the Big Issues for Every 21st Century Teacher*. Retrieved from
<http://www.ebllib.com>

Kuhlthau, C., Maniotes, L.K., & Caspari, A.K. (2007). *Guided inquiry: Learning in the 21st century*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) (2010). *Together For Learning*. Toronto: OSLA.

Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2008). *Connections: Policy and guidelines for school libraries in Saskatchewan*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=24424>

Appendix A

Teacher-Librarian Questionnaire – thank you for completing by Monday, April 13, 2015 and return to Teresa’s mailbox or office desk.

1. Prior to September 2014 have you ever partnered with a teacher-librarian?

Yes _____

No _____

2. Have you partnered with your teacher-librarian this 2014-2015 school year?

Yes _____

No _____

3. What learning skills did your students refine as a result of the collaboration? (technological, library, creative, communication, literacy, etc.). Please explain.

4. What are the benefits to your students of partnering with the teacher-librarian?

5. What are the benefits to you as the teacher?

6. How has the change to the physical environment of the Learning Commons impacted your wish to use the Learning Commons?

Please respond: NOT AT ALL, SOME, GREATLY

Cleanliness of room	not at all	some	greatly
Brightening of environment	not at all	some	greatly
Reorganization of resources	not at all	some	greatly
Ordering of new resources	not at all	some	greatly
Teacher sign-out calendar	not at all	some	greatly
Bulletin boards, displays posters	not at all	some	greatly
Staff work area	not at all	some	greatly

Other – please explain:

7. What are the challenges to you as a teacher/to your students to partnering with the teacher-librarian? Any suggestions would be appreciated

8. Does partnering this year make you more inclined to partner with your teacher-librarian next school year?

Likely _____

Not likely _____

N/A _____

Please indicate why or why not:

Any additional comments:
