

A Reflection of the Collaborative Working Relationship of a School and Public Library

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Introduction:

This paper will discuss the collaborative relationship between Nottawasaga Pines Secondary School (NPSS) and the Essa Public Library – Angus Branch (EPL) over the past five years, through the lens of the teacher-librarian. What are the strengths and challenges of a shared space in a school and community library?

The building was designed by Snyder Architects and built by Percon Construction for the Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB). In September 2011, the building opened its doors to the community. Contained within the building are the community public library and a satellite station for the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP). On the same property is the Angus Recreation Center, Food Bank, and an early years learning center creating a community hub for the Town of Angus.

This paper will outline demographics of the community and review strengths and challenges of the Joint-Use Agreement between the school and public library. The two entities collaborate daily and share resources. Suggestions for next steps for improvement of the Joint-Use Agreement from the teacher-librarian lens will be offered.

School and Community Demographics:

The Town of Angus – Borden CFB has a population of 12,640 (Statistics Canada, 2016). There are 835 teenagers between the ages of 15 – 19 (Statistics Canada, 2016). The first official spoken languages in the homes are English (89.7%), French (9.6%), English & French (0.4%) and neither English nor French (0.2%) (Statistics Canada, 2016). The median total income for couples with children in 2015 was \$104, 937 and the median income total for lone-parent families in 2015 was \$62, 549 (Statistics Canada, 2016). The Town of Angus is located within Essa Township, offering the relative closeness to urban amenities with the feel of a rural community.



Figure 1. Location of Angus, Ontario. Angus is part of Essa Township and located next to Canadian Forces Base Borden. The town is located approximately 120 km from Toronto, Ontario (Google Maps, 2022).

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Nottawasaga Pines Secondary School is a three-floor building with approximately 700 students and 50 teachers in 2022. The first floor is home to the school library and public library, cafeteria, gymnasium, all technology studies classrooms, life skills, dance studio, and drama/music rooms. The second and third floors house all other classrooms. The school was designed with geothermal energy, xeriscaping, high-performance glass, CO2 and ventilation systems control, and photovoltaic solar electricity generation (Snyder Architects, 2013). An OPP station entrance is located on the west side of the school.



Figure 2. Nottawasaga Pines Secondary School, Angus, Ontario. The gymnasium is in the bottom left of the image, front doors in the center, and the Essa Public Library is the far right in the image (Snyder Architects, 2013).

The Essa Public Library has two locations, Angus and Thornton, to serve the residents of Essa Township. The Angus branch is located within NPSS. Within the Joint-Use/Asset Protection and Leasehold Agreement, the Angus branch is a leaseholder for 10-year terms (By-Law No. 2011-75, p. 5). The library offers both physical and digital resources for students and community members to access. Physical resources beyond books include technology, 3D printer, vinyl cutter, a kitchen appliance library and more. The borrowing policies and procedures apply to students of NPSS during school hours.



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Figure 3. Essa Public Library – Angus Branch located within Nottawasaga Pines Secondary School, Angus, Ontario (Essex Public Library n.d.).

School Library and Public Library Images



Figures 4 & 5. In the photo on the left, students access the school library through doors located within the school. On the right, public patrons access the library from outside of the school building. After school hours, students and public patrons use the doors located on the right.



Figures 6 & 7. These images are of *Teen Central*. Classes reserve this space in the library when they come to work. In this area of the library, the graphic novels, young adult fiction, board games, and comics are shelved.



Figures 8, 9 & 10. These images are of the main shelves of the public library, the front door and public library desktop computer bank, and a panoramic view of the Kids' Room.

Joint-Use Agreement, School Board Pillars, and OSSTF D17 Collective Agreement

To ensure the functioning and use of shared spaces, there are documents that set expectations and guide the daily operations.

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The original Joint Use/Asset Protection and Leasehold Agreement (Corporation of the Township of Essa, December 2011), was finalized and passed on December 21, 2011 (By-Law No. 2011-75, 2011, p. 1). The agreement was formed between the SCDSB, the Corporation of the Township of Essa, and the EPL Board. Key points of the agreement that impact the role of the teacher-librarian are found in *Schedule “B” Rights & Responsibilities* of the agreement. Significant roles for the teacher-librarian include borrowing privileges, library services, collections, and privacy and confidentiality (By-Law No. 2011-75, 2011, pp. 17 – 23).

The SCDSB has strategic priorities to develop a community of empowered learners for life. One of the four pillars in the 2017 – 2022 strategic priorities are “Community” with a goal of “purposeful partnerships and lifelong learning” (Simcoe County District School Board, n.d.).



Figure 11. The 2017 – 2022 strategic priorities of the Simcoe County District School Board. Under community the goals of purposeful partnerships and lifelong learning are specified (Simcoe County District School Board, n.d.).

Under the Collective Agreement the SCDSB and Ontario Secondary School Teacher’s Federation (OSSTF) District 17 Teacher’s Bargaining Unit there is a Position of Responsibility for the Library Curriculum Leader. Point L15.01.c of the Collective Agreement states, “Library Curriculum Leader – will support school-wide literacy initiatives” (Collective Agreement, p. local 13 of 79). Also, in the Joint-Use Agreement, By-Law B3.3 specifies “The Teacher-Librarian will provide library services to the students during regular school hours” (By-Law No. 2011-75, p. 17). These clauses help to preserve the role of the teacher-librarian in the school and shared spaces.

Strengths

Having access to a greater number of resources and a larger space has led to many strengths in the collaborative relationship:

1. Greater Access to Resources:

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- a. Hours of Operation: Schedule “B” Rights and Responsibilities B3.1 states “The hours of operation for the Public Library shall be set by the Library Board. The library hours shall not restrict the use of the library by the School Board during regular hours. The Public Library may be open to the public during and outside of regular school hours.” (By-Law 2011-75, p.17) This benefits students as the NPSS library opens to students around 7:30am and the EPL remains open until 8:00pm most nights. During the school day, students typically use the school entrance to access the library. Once the public library opens to the public (at 10:00am), the public enter the space via the public entrance; students may also use this entrance. At the end of the school day, school access is locked, and students become “members of the public” and continue to use the space as would a public patron. All designated school library space during the day, is available for public patrons to use after school hours.
- b. Collections: Schedule “B” Rights and Responsibilities B3.2 states “Library materials circulated for school and public use will be catalogued, processed, shelved, and re-shelved by Library Board personnel with assistance from the Teacher-Librarian.” (By-Law 2011-75, p.17) By filing all collections under the EPL, students have greater access to resources as the school materials are blended into the public library collection. Also, Schedule “B” B2.1 states “The Library Board will provide NPSS students and staff with a library card which expires annually on the 30th day of June.” (By-Law 2011-75, p.17) This opportunity to share resources and give each student and staff member a library card is a benefit for all. For example, NPSS has learners ranging from life skills to grade 12 university level. Students in the life skills class who read below a grade 3 level have access to all resources for children and emerging readers. Grade 12 advanced readers, have access to challenging reads and all genres. Additionally, the EPL has multilingual novels which benefits students enrolled in the NPSS English as a Second Language program. The EPL offers students access to greater resources than neighboring secondary schools. For example, students have access to online databases for research, kitchen library (ex. Air fryer, popcorn machine, etc.), 3D printer, vinyl cutter, and more. It should be noted that most resources have been purchased by the EPL. NPSS contributes by purchasing expendable materials (ex. Vinyl) that students use and some novels.

2. Collaborative Opportunities

- a. Partnerships Between Public Library Staff and School Teachers: The EPL has a dynamic library team that works to develop relationships with NPSS students. For example, over the years of 2019 – 2021 the EPL Manager received a community grant from RBC for \$120,000. Through this grant, NPSS students were given access to speciality training (ex. CPR/First Aid, chainsaw safety, working at heights), guest speakers (ex. wrestler Cody Deaner, Olympian Sarah Wells, Magician Scott Hammell) and workshops (ex. Confidence building by “Incredible You”, leadership by Fahd Alhattab, Journaling for Relaxation). Most of these experiences were also open to members of the public and/or non-NPSS students after hours. Prior to Covid-19, the EPL partnered with the NPSS hospitality teacher for evenings where a community music group would provide entertainment and

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hospitality students would provide the food. During these events, the public library would have a permit so that participants could move seamlessly between the library and school spaces. In September 2021, the EPL and NPSS committed to developing a Truth and Reconciliation Garden for in front of the library. Together, students and members of the public are creating hearts that will be displayed in the garden. The technology teacher at NPSS has created an 8-foot metal sign to recognize the garden. The final product will be celebrated in September 2022.

- b. Choice Seating and Spaces: During school operation hours, NPSS has exclusive access to *Teen Central* and *The Lions' Den*. The EPL has exclusive access to *The Sargeant's Room*. This is outlined in "Article 7: Access to Facilities" (By-Law 2011-75, p.11) That said, NPSS and EPL staff work together when access to the space is needed outside of dictated times. The two spaces are separated by a collapsible, accordion-style wall. Thus, when a larger space is needed the wall can be opened. For example, when the EPL runs a "Wiggles and Giggles" group for parents and toddlers, the EPL will reserve *The Lions' Den* via the teacher-librarian. During school hours, public patrons have priority seating in the EPL. Through discussions, the EPL manager and NPSS teacher-librarian set expectations that permit students to choose seating in the EPL during school hours. During the school year the EPL and teacher-librarian revisit the space sharing to ensure students are respecting the informal agreement.

3. NPSS and EPL Communication

- a. Communication: To ensure a functional relationship, it is key to have active communication between the teacher-librarians, library manager, library CEO, and public librarians. Formal facilitation of communication occurs at monthly Joint-Use Agreement Meetings between the teacher-librarian, an NPSS administrator, the EPL manager and the EPL CEO. During this meeting, updates are provided by the EPL and NPSS, and discussions are held. The minutes from these monthly meetings are passed onto the Library Board for review. Informal communication occurs daily between public librarians and teacher-librarians at the front desk. Teacher-librarians can ask public librarians questions about the collection or library software as needed. Public librarians can ask teacher-librarians to address any poor behavior by students.

Challenges

Sharing a space and resources can lead to challenges with the EPL and NPSS in the collaborative relationship, such as:

1. Staffing and Personnel Matters

- a. Teacher-Librarian Turnover: Due to the nature of teacher timetabling there has been a large turnover of teacher-librarians over the past five years. Schedule "B" Rights and Responsibilities B3.3 states, "The Teacher-Librarian will provide library services to the students during regular school hours" (By-Law 2011-75, p.17). If a teacher is placed into the library and not enthusiastic and committed to learning the library management systems, the teacher-librarian then becomes a burden on the

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public librarians. This also contravenes the by-laws where it states in B13.2, “The School Board will provide such trained staff as may be required to meet the needs of an supervise students using the Public Library during regular school hours in accordance with relevant Collective Agreements” (By-Law 2011-75, p. 22).

- b. Privacy and Confidentiality: As more staff circulate through the library on supervision or in the role of teacher-librarian, there are greater chances for a breach of privacy and confidentiality. Schedule “B” Rights and Responsibilities B15.3 states, “School Board staff shall comply with their statutory duties of confidentiality as set out in the *Education Act* and the *Ontario College of Teachers Act*” (By-Law 2011-75, p. 22). Since NPSS uses the public library management system, teacher-librarians have access to information of members of the public. It is critical that all teacher-librarians know the confidentiality expectations.
 - c. School Staff Supervision: Students are allowed to use the school library during lunch hour. Under the OSSTF collective agreement, supervisions assigned to teachers must be equitable in nature. Thus, there are many staff members assigned to lunch supervision. Schedule “B” Rights and Responsibilities B3.4 states, “It is the responsibility of School Board staff to supervision students during regular school hours” (By-Law 2011-75, p.17). These teachers are expected to learn how to use the library management system and supervise students. The school has run into challenges as some staff are not committed to learning the required library skills.
 - d. School Administration: In the SCDSB, school administration is moved between locations approximately every 5 years. This leads to the library portfolio being bounced between administration. Not all administration has familiarized themselves with the Joint-Use Agreement. This leads to challenges for the Library Curriculum Leader as they become the middle person between the EPL and NPSS trying to diffuse challenging situations.
2. Outgrowing Space
 - a. Spaces Filled: The library is divided into two general areas during the school day. On the public library side, there are two meeting rooms that are conjoined. *The Lions’ Den* is available exclusively for school use during the school day. *The Sergeants Room* is available exclusively for EPL use during the school day. That said, NPSS and the EPL work collaboratively to share these exclusive spaces as needed. For example, NPSS will regularly reserve *The Lions’ Den* for social workers and for testing purposes (ex. Occupational therapists, speech pathologist, standardized tests). The EPL regularly uses *The Sergeants Room* for parent & toddler programs as well as multilingual programming. These rooms are used approximately 75% of the time. Due to programming sizes, sometimes NPSS and the EPL need to use both rooms. To coordinate this, NPSS reserves these spaces via a digital booking system. The EPL and NPSS are outgrowing their space.
 3. Borrowing Privileges
 - a. Student Privileges Outdated: Schedule “B” Rights and Responsibilities B2.1 states “The Library Board will provide Nottawasaga Pines Secondary School students and staff with a library card which expires annually on the 30th day of June” (By-Law 2011-75, p.17). This has been a challenge keeping up to date as each student receives a card in grade 9. If a teacher-librarian is unfamiliar with the card

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registration process or the Joint-Use Agreement, they might not realize that the expectation is an expiration date for June 30th annually. It has recently been noted that there are several hundred library cards that still have card holders listed as students, despite having graduated in 2012. This leads to outdated contact information and many unused user profiles. This fall, one of the teacher-librarians spent time going through a student list and updating hundred of card statuses.

Suggestions for Improvement

To ensure that NPSS is not in violation of the Joint Use Agreement, it is imperative that teacher-librarians are properly trained. Areas of training should focus on:

1. Operation of the library management system (ex. User profiles, due date modifications, library card renewals, etc.).
2. Emphasis on privacy and confidentiality.
3. Supervision requirements established in the Joint-Use Agreement meetings.
4. Equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The teacher-librarians should develop a plan to annually update the statuses of student library cards. If a student is no longer on NPSS roll, they should have their status changed from student to a member of the public.

Administration should ensure that teachers who are assigned supervision during lunch hour are familiarized with the basics of the library management system. All teachers assigned such supervision should be required to sign the privacy and confidentiality waiver to protect all patrons of the EPL.

Monthly contact should be made between the Library Curriculum Leader and the EPL to confirm usage of reserved spaces. Given that both libraries are outgrowing their spaces, it is imperative that reservations are kept up to date to ensure greatest usage.

Conclusion:

Being a collaborative space between NPSS and EPL provides more opportunities for both students and the greater community. From an educational standpoint, the collaborative space allows staff and students to have better access to resources compared to neighbouring schools. The funding that the EPL and NPSS receive from the government goes further as resource duplication is avoided, and resources are maximally used within the community, circulating all year. Teacher-librarian and public librarians' cooperation are paramount to a smooth-running facility. Teacher-librarians should continue to familiarize themselves with the requirements of the Joint-Use Agreement to ensure optimal facility operation. Greater access to the public library has encouraged adolescents to take ownership and appreciate the joys of a community library within the school. By having the public library in the school space, the relationship has created a welcoming community feel for the Town of Angus.

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