

Examining the School Librarian's Role in New Teacher Resilience

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There are times when we need to step out of our library comfort zone to advocate for practices that improve the whole school climate. As a practicing school librarian and a NxtWave scholar, I was thrilled to be offered the opportunity to study mentoring of new teachers by school librarians.

My field study was selected for a grant under the AASL CLASS II initiative to systemically develop and test a model of caring for new teachers through collaboration in authentic school settings, then determine how this research could translate into practice (Soulen 2020). As a continuation of this field study, I also surveyed the school librarians who served as mentors to examine their role in enabling collaboration (Soulen 2021).

Background

First-year teachers face many challenges as they enter the profession. From my own experience, I know that new teachers are eager to form partnerships, which often become collaborative relationships that last for years. The AASL Standards recommend school librarians get to know colleagues as people before attempting to convince them to collaborate, building trust and leading to long-lasting professional relationships (2018). School librarians are in a unique position to build resilience

in new teachers through mentoring to improve performance while at the same time raising employee well-being (Seligman 2011).

In my field study, fifteen school librarians agreed to help twenty-six new teachers develop resilience by engaging, empowering, partnering, and co-teaching with the teachers. After the field study, I asked the librarians to complete a survey to examine their perceptions of the interventions for new teachers.

Examples of interventions from the field study included visiting the teacher's classroom for a quick needs assessment, sharing some social time over a soda or hot chocolate, sending a virtual greeting card, providing informational resources, offering library programming for the teacher's classes, letting administrators know about the teacher's successes, partnering to plan instruction, co-teaching, and shared assessment.

Findings from the Survey

Responses indicated the school librarians' overwhelming support of providing interventions for new teacher resilience. The survey responses demonstrated that 93 percent of librarians felt:

- new teachers need to be resilient, so school librarians need to provide interventions to promote resilience.
- school librarians are uniquely situated to mentor new teachers as a precursor to collaboration.
- greater resilience in new teachers leads to reduced burnout and increased retention.
- both mentoring and collaboration are expected roles for school librarians.
- the interventions were appropriate and effectively implemented.

All school librarians agreed that the interventions contributed to increased new teacher resilience, decreased burnout, and increased retention. They also found that their own mentoring and collaboration skills improved as a result of the field study.

Eighty-seven percent of school librarians responded that there were just enough interventions in the model (two activities per week for sixteen weeks). Sixty percent felt that four months of interventions was enough time to affect new teacher resilience.

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Open-ended responses provided more information about barriers and enablers for mentoring and collaboration. As you can see from the responses below, time and scheduling were common barriers, while dispositions to engage in mentoring and collaboration were important enablers.

The barriers to mentoring and collaboration included:

- New teachers were overburdened and overwhelmed
- Fixed schedules, duty schedules, and planning and resource times made coordination difficult
- School library was closed for testing/school librarians were used as test administrators and proctors
- In school libraries with a part-time assistant, clerical duties left little time to collaborate
- School announced inclement weather days

The school librarians also identified additional duties that may have negatively influenced their abilities to mentor and collaborate, including:

- Supervising afterschool library time

This mentoring of new teachers by school librarians can be a first step to explore pathways to foster collaboration.

- Club sponsor
- Fundraising
- PTA liaison
- Volunteer coordinator
- Grade-level chair
- Department chair
- Homebound instructor
- Technology go-to
- Training new testing chair
- Tutor
- Code facilitator
- Student remediation

The school librarians described enablers for mentoring and collaboration as:

- Willingness of new teachers to participate
- Full support of administration
- Desire to participate and make the program work
- Flexible schedule
- Location of new teachers' classrooms
- Hybrid electronic and face-to-face communication
- Well-outlined model with easy-to-follow examples
- Lots of space in school library for class visits

Implications for Practice

Over the years school librarians have moved from working with teachers in the selection and use of materials to partnering to plan and carry out library programming. Through these partnerships, school librarians can boost resilience in new teachers and build their professional skills. The school librarians surveyed in this study agreed that this model of caring for new teachers provides practical interventions that can transform the working lives of our teacher colleagues. This mentoring of new teachers by school librarians can be a first step to explore pathways to foster collaboration.

Developing teacher resilience has been linked to reduced burnout and increased retention (Johnson et al. 2016), which may result in better student achievement. Teaching resilient strategies and mindsets through professional development for new teachers builds a collaborative school climate, which can benefit all students and teachers in the school.

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Quality mentoring and collaboration require time, a highly valued resource in schools. District and school administrators interested in building an infrastructure of such support should establish flexible scheduling and reduce noninstructional duties for school librarians in order to target collaborative practice. School librarians should prioritize activities that promote a collaborative school environment and provide support for those new to the profession.

The Collaborate Shared Foundation from the AASL Standards recognizes the importance of practices that enable long-term collaborative relationships (2018). Highly qualified school librarians can influence the school ecology to engage, empower, partner, and co-teach as best practice. By connecting personally and professionally to teachers in their first years, school librarians can contribute to a school community that encourages collaboration and creates an optimal learning environment for students.

School librarians have a voice and insight into new teacher resilience. We need to act as leaders to advocate for school and district policies that support mentoring and collaborative practices. Exercise your voice to be a leader in your school and district.

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