As school library researchers, we have the opportunity to develop partnerships across our campuses that have the potential to not only benefit practitioners but also leverage those relationships for awareness and advocacy about the important role that school librarians play in K-12 schools.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration in School Library Research

Jenna Spiering
spiering@mailbox.sc.edu

Denice Adkins
dcadkins@yahoo.com

Maria Cahill
maria.cahill@uky.edu

Daniella Cook
cookda2@mailbox.sc.edu

Library preparation programs advocate for active and ongoing collaboration between school librarians and classroom teachers. Though library and information science is an interdisciplinary field, the research literature does not always highlight the collaborative potential within our field. As school library researchers, we have the opportunity to develop partnerships across our campuses that have the potential to not only benefit practitioners but also leverage those relationships for awareness and advocacy about the important role that school librarians play in K-12 schools.

In this article, we discuss two grant-funded projects that highlight interdisciplinary research collaborations and the impact our projects (and others like it) can have both for school library research and practitioners in the field. In the first project, a school library educator and a social studies educator worked together to develop sustained professional development opportunities for school librarians and social studies teachers. In the second project, school library educators partnered with a team of special educators to identify ways libraries serve learners with disabilities in the prekindergarten years.

Exploring the Long Arc of the Civil Rights Movement in Professional Development for School Librarians and Social Studies Teachers

Our Project

While school library preparation programs often advocate collaboration and instructional partnerships, in practice, school librarians and classroom teachers do not always have the time and support needed to engage in meaningful collaborative work (Lance 2010). As two researchers from the University of South Carolina (Spiering and Cook), one in the iSchool (school libraries) and the other in the College of Education (social studies education), we received a Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources grant. It allowed us to design a series of professional development experiences that brought classroom teachers and school librarians together to deepen their own professional learning, develop collaborative relationships within their buildings, and enhance their curricula through dedicated time for lesson plan creation.

Participants in our project included Fellows who took part in a two-year, place-based exploration of civil rights history in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Participants completed pre- and post-event surveys, completed products (lesson plans), and participated in a reflection session at the end of the project. Our research explored how educators’ (social
studies classroom teachers and school librarians) participation in virtual as well as face-to-face professional development settings informed their deeper understanding of and collaborative teaching about the civil rights movement (CRM).

Implications for Practice

The implications of this research draw upon what we learned from participants about the aspects of professional development design that impacted their learning and collaborative practice most.

1. **Access to resources and community.** A goal of our grant was to facilitate the use of The Library of Congress (LOC) resources among a community of interdisciplinary practitioners. Participants in our project report that, in the past, utilizing the vast resources of the LOC has felt daunting. Therefore, the time and space to learn about and use the LOC archival resources embedded within the professional development experience were vital. Participants’ confidence in using the LOC increased and inspired their learning about their local community’s role in the civil rights movement. Community exploration helped their professional learning. This can be applied to any professional development. While sharing resources is important, it is equally important to make time to discuss and imagine the possibilities for those resources in the classroom within a community of educators.

2. **Confidence teaching about the civil rights movement.** Sometimes, we expect classroom teachers and school librarians to have substantive content knowledge on all topics, but the reality is that there is always so much more to learn. While all our participants had a basic understanding of the CRM, they gained a more nuanced understanding. Opportunities for professional development that provides space for deep and complex content explorations are invigorating for educators.

3. **Inspiration and a push to create new material.** It is no secret that one of the most precious resources for educators is time. Even when there is a will to update materials and incorporate new knowledge, there is not always the space to do so. When educators have time, support, and paid opportunities and are engaged in a supportive community, they are emboldened to try new things and incorporate new content.

**Services for Children of ALL Abilities in Libraries: An Exploration (SCALE) Project**

**Our Project**

How can public libraries better meet the needs of young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays and their families? The *Services for Children of ALL Abilities in Libraries: An Exploration (SCALE) project* is a “Research in Service to Practice” project funded by the Institute of Museum and Libraries Services (LG-246297-OLS-20) designed to answer that question. Libraries have been working toward inclusive and equitable access to library services and programs for young children with disabilities, but such families don’t always feel welcome in the library and don’t always perceive that library programs are designed for families like theirs (Prendergast 2016).

The SCALE project is a collaboration among library and information science and early childhood special educators at three universities: the University of Kentucky, the University of Missouri, and Emporia State University. The project team observed library programs for young children, surveyed caregivers, and both interviewed and held focus groups with children with disabilities and their caregivers, plus a range of...
Quality learning experiences and interactions are important for all young children but are particularly critical for young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays, often requiring targeted intervention to support development across one or more maturational domains: physical, cognitive, social, psychological, and language.

Professionals in public libraries, early childhood education, PK-12 schools, and early intervention services.

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Implications for Practice

1. Library programming can reduce isolation. Children with disabilities and their parents.

Even Small Contributions Add Up

Would you like to be involved but feel that you don’t have the time to commit? Or are you new to school librarianship and feel intimidated? AASL has various opportunities for members to participate in the work of the association through short-term projects. Your colleagues value the unique perspective you bring to the profession—submit your interest to give back to your community today!

- Participate on an AASL committee
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- Contribute to a position statement
- Develop a resource guide or brochure
- Deliver eLearning on a current topic
- Share your expertise in an AASL publication
- Write an article for Knowledge Quest
- Blog on a timely professional topic for KQ

And many other opportunities to get involved at various levels!

For more information, visit www.al.org/aasl/getinvolved
School special education coordinators need more integration between public libraries and the school system, particularly for the transition to kindergarten. Successful partnerships between public libraries and schools took time to build but showed their value.

2. Open lines of communication help everyone. Parents often feel uncomfortable advocating for accommodations for their children or worry that their children might behave inappropriately in a library setting. However, public librarians generally didn’t judge young children’s behaviors, and they recognized parents as the experts on their own children. Effective adaptations often came from parents asking for specific kinds of accommodations or telling librarians what their child’s needs were.

3. We are stronger together. Early intervention specialists want more integration between public libraries and other early intervention services. School special education coordinators need more integration between public libraries and the school system, particularly for the transition to kindergarten. Successful partnerships between public libraries and schools took time to build but showed their value.

4. Professional development helps. Public librarians freely admitted needing more training to feel fully competent in serving children with disabilities. Notably, those who felt most confident often had previous experience in PK-12 special education. Several noted the value of professional development for developing or renewing skills and sharing ideas with others.
Works Cited:


