

New York City Partnerships: How Public Librarians and School Librarians Work Together in the CLASP Initiative

Sandra Kennedy Bright

Director, Office of School Library Services
New York City Department of Education
USA
and

Katherine Todd

CLASP Manager (Retired)
New York Public Library
USA

New York City by virtue of its size and its eight million residents is a wonderful microcosm of the world. There are many opportunities for professionals to try new and unique ways of working, because there is always someone with a great idea waiting to try their wings. The CLASP program identifies three C's for us to try on for size, Communication, Cooperation and Collaboration. This partnership in NYC was especially beneficial to children, parents and educators. CLASP successfully linked the importance of children's reading and access to materials to the mission of school and public library cooperation.

Introduction

New York City (NYC) with its eight million residents is surely a microcosm of the world at large. The statistics created by the vastness of the city and its population can be mind boggling and astounding. I'll save the major statistics for later. I'd like to begin with a few brief examples of school and public library collaboration that detail how NYC models behavior for other cities, towns and municipalities world-wide. These exemplify the variety of collaborative ways that NYC school and public libraries work together annually.

A Unique Opportunity for Collaboration

The idea of dazzling students with books about New York City was a new one. What a wonderful opportunity for cooperation! The idea was ingenious. Who would have thought of creating a bibliography of New York City books for New York City kids? Why of course, it was I!

I had felt for several years that there were so many great books about NYC or books that are set in NYC, or books by authors from NYC, that a definitive, well-organized, annotated bibliography would be a good thing for NYC kids. I mentioned my idea to a few school and public librarians and each thought "Oh, what a good idea!" but no one volunteered to organize the work. A few months passed and I got a phone call from Marilyn Ackerman, Children's Materials Selection Specialists for Brooklyn Public Library. She had heard about my idea and wanted to discuss it. Her first question was "How far along are you in selecting materials?" Well, in truth the idea was still a gem waiting to be more fully shaped and polished. Ms. Ackerman asked several questions and had many suggestions. One of her suggestions was that maybe she could organize a meeting of the three library systems, if I could suggest a few school librarians who would like participate. Then a discussion might begin. I had several school librarians to recommend and the first meeting for the NYC bibliography was arranged. Many concerns were expressed by committee members at the first meeting.

The results of that two-year collaboration were extremely exciting and satisfying. The committee created two annotated bibliographies: one for pre-kindergarten through 8th grade students and the second for 7th through 12th grade students. We agreed from the beginning on a few criteria:

- Only books owned by all three public library systems would be included on the lists,
- Books by NYC authors would be included only if the setting or plot were about NYC,
- Mature titles on the 7th through 12th grades list would be followed by an asterisk, and
- All titles had to still be in print.

The committee met in branch libraries across the city. The graphics department of Brooklyn Public Library did a marvelous job of designing and illustrating the two tri-fold lists. We now have two colorful, high-quality, professionally selected up-to-date annotated bibliographies that appeal to NYC educators and students from pre-kindergarten through the 12th grade. The bibliographies are widely distributed through NYC school library media centers and all 208 branches of the tri-library system. This is just one successful example of school and public library cooperation in NYC.

Annual Collaborative Projects

Professional development programs for school librarians are held annually in the spring and the fall semesters with the participation and input of the tri-library system professional staffs. Extensive planning takes place prior to all meetings. Annually the spring meetings are held in tri-library system branches in each of the five boroughs of NYC. The public library staffs share hosting the meetings and conferences, developing the agendas, and conducting workshops and presenting at these meetings. It is both a benefit and an advantage for the school and public library staffs to take every opportunity to meet and collaborate on professional development issues and concerns that impact the city's children.

The development of the summer reading lists and programs for NYC students is a joint project. The tri-library/school network meets at least four times annually to develop the children's and young adult lists with annotations using the New York State theme for summer reading. Un-graded summer lists are provided for special needs students annually and bilingual lists have been done in Spanish and Chinese. The theme for this year, 2003, is "Picture This, Imagine That."

The New York Public Library (NYPL) annually creates the "Books for the Teenage", a bibliography of over eight hundred titles for our young adults. The cover illustration is secured through a citywide art competition for NYC high school students. There were over 200 entries for cover art this year. The winning artwork becomes the cover illustration, and the runner up artwork is displayed in the expansive picture window of the NYPL, Donnell Library Center for the entire city to view. The unveiling of the artwork and bibliography was scheduled for March 2003.

The Annual Citywide Storytelling Festival of the Division of Instructional Support, Office of School Library Services, has had its borough finals in branches of the tri-library system for over 18. Many of the judges are children's and young adult librarians from the tri-library system.

Training teachers to Bridge the Digital Divide was another unique program designed to provide collaboration between the school community and New York Public Library. Training teachers is like planting seeds. A classroom teacher reaches 30 students this year, 30 students next year and 30 students the following year. The knowledge that a teacher has acquired grows and spreads throughout a community. This is the concept that led to the design of Preparing Library Activities with New Technology (PLANT), a teacher training program developed to bridge the digital divide. It was initiated by librarians at NYPL and offered to teachers and school librarians in NYC. The first PLANT workshops were offered in 1995.

PLANT was designed as a multi-session workshop in computer technology, with a particular focus on using computers to access library resources and research materials. The training was not limited to using technology. It was NYPL's goal to help teachers and school librarians develop lesson plans that would incorporate computer skills into all curriculum areas. PLANT was designed to take place over four sessions, with each session running for two hours weekly.

Hands-on training was provided in four subject areas:

- Using the Library's online catalog
- Searching magazines databases
- Navigating the Internet
- Finding WEB sites using search engines

At the conclusion of the training, teachers and school librarians were asked to prepare a lesson plan that incorporated newly learned skills into their instructional framework.

PLANT sessions were held in NYPL computer training centers, where participants could work at their own terminal. The four sessions were sometimes held after school. Other workshops were offered for four weeks during summer vacation. NYPL's experience was that participants could be more attentive and had time to develop more effective projects when they attended during the summer.

One of the things discovered while presenting training in the use of the online OPAC was that many classroom teachers are not familiar with current children's literature. When participants located titles in the catalog they had no way of knowing whether a book was appropriate for the class they were teaching. NYPL librarians decided it was important not only to teach computer skills but to familiarize the participants with current trends in children's literature.

A second course, Advanced PLANT, combined reading of children's books with online educational resources. The citywide summer reading lists were used as the basis for the course. That meant that participants were assigned to read the same books that students were reading and then they were to develop follow-up activities for students for the subsequent school year. Advanced PLANT developed curriculum activities that were supported by websites, techniques for evaluating website content, making bibliographies using Excel, and many other computer skills were part of the course curriculum.

A Brief History of Libraries in New York City

Looking at the history and development of NYC it is very interesting to note the creation of public school libraries and public libraries in the city. First one gets a fascinating view of the city starting out as five independent boroughs. The boroughs were governed autonomously. The original Board of Education was founded in 1842. It was the result of unification on the part of the city's five boroughs to form one public education system for students. The five boroughs unified the fire department, and police department over 100 years ago. It is around this time that three separate public library systems decided to remain independent.

New York Public Library, founded in 1895, now has 85 branches; Brooklyn Public Library, founded in 1896, now has 60 branches; and Queens Borough Public Library now has 63 branches. Each of these systems currently has major building projects going on, as each system continues to grow. These 208 branches of the city's public library systems serve the eight million residents of NYC as well as the thousands of others who work in the city. Although the three systems have always remained independent, they have worked together from their earliest history. The term 'tri-library network' pre-dates the CLASP Initiative.

The CLASP Initiative

The Connecting Libraries and Schools Project was called CLASP, because NYPL liked the images evoked by the word "clasp": an adult clasping the hand of a child as they enter the local public library, the clasp of a handshake initiating the meeting of a teacher and librarians, the hands of a student clasping a book signifying a love of reading, and the image of a necklace clasp linking the schools with public libraries.

CLASP: The Pilot Project

The New York Public Library received the largest private grant ever given to support public – school collaboration. The goal of the collaboration was to ensure that every school child in grades kindergarten through eighth

grade received exposure to an array of public library services: a library visit with library card registration, an orientation to the public library for their teachers and parents, a summer reading program, and after school library activities. NYPL's tradition of programming to attract children and young adults into public libraries provided the foundation for CLASP. There was one year of planning time built into the grant, 1990-1991. The three-year pilot project resulted in 4,465 programs. The program reached 120,875 students, parents and educators. New library cards were issued to 22,742 children, teenagers and adults. In three NYC community school districts, 22 librarians worked on the project, some participated for the first few months, and some continued to participate for several years after the pilot ended.

CLASP targeted public school students in certain grades as well as targeting student behavior and attitudes that are influenced by adults both at home and at school. Parents provide a home environment that forms attitudes toward reading, and they are a key factor in the ability of students to travel to their local library. Teachers have daily extended contact with students that can reinforce ideas introduced by school and public librarians. School administrators set the tone for services within schools. School librarians are the natural allies of the public librarians, and enhancing the status of both within the educational hierarchy is essential. CLASP developed programs to reach these significant adults as well as their students.

The three community school districts that were funded by the initial CLASP grant contained 102 schools and 23 of the NYPL branch libraries. Grant money provided an opportunity to try new staffing patterns, supplement book budgets, and provide program support. In addition to offering the basic program of library services, CLASP was able to implement several special projects. Now the CLASP pilot was completed. What was learned? What techniques could other librarians replicate? What would be the future for CLASP?

Institutionalization of CLASP Initiatives

The vision of CLASP was to make reading and books an integral part of lives of New York City's schoolchildren. The mission of CLASP was to create new links among teachers, school and public librarians, parents and children through a variety of activities, programs and services. CLASP had three broad goals:

- To support collaboration and cooperation between New York City schools and the three public library systems.
- To encourage family reading and family literacy and make it enjoyable.
- To increase community awareness and use of all local public library branches.

The services provided were not new for public libraries to provide, but they were targeted through CLASP to focus on NYC's youth. The programs and services included:

1. Library card registration for children and families
2. Workshops for teachers, school librarians and parents
3. Guidelines for the integration of literacy training
4. Tri-library joint planning sessions for professional development
5. After school, weekend, and summer programs to promote reading
6. Articulation between school and public libraries regarding resources

When NYPL made a report at the halfway point of the pilot project, success could already be identified and listed. For instance, "Open School Nights", when schools are filled with parents meeting teachers, provide an excellent opportunity for library staff to greet parents and direct them to the local branch of the library. A poignant example is the parent, a new immigrant who had never traveled more than five blocks from her home, who met the local children's librarian from the public library at an Open School Night. The very next day this parent traversed the seven blocks to the public library, confident that a friendly face would be waiting for her there. Due to the success of the pilot project, Open School Nights activities were expanded from the 23 CLASP branches to all NYPL branches. The grant provided funding to pay for two or three hours of overtime for public library staffs to set up information tables in the schools on these special nights and other school occasions without effecting public service hours at the library branches.

When CLASP staff adopted the "Assignment Alert" form, NYPL was hoping that teachers would warn the public library about upcoming homework assignments. NYPL quickly learned that school librarians share the problem of assignments that tax existing library resources and frustrate students. Assignment Alert has become a good focal point for faculty conferences where school and public librarians can discuss the impact of homework on libraries.

CLASP prepared summer reading lists, supported by a budget that allowed the purchase some additional copies of some of the titles. This ability was hailed for overcoming the issue of school reading lists that contained out-of-date or unavailable titles. Because of the summer reading lists success, the preparation and distribution of these lists was expanded to a citywide effort. In 1995, for the first time the lists were jointly prepared and specifically designed for distribution by all NYC public schools as well as all branches of three library systems. These lists provided a uniform message about the importance of summer reading. In 1996, the impact was further enhanced by a budget to purchase copies of all of the summer titles for all eighty-two branches of NYPL.

Targeted Activities and Special Populations

Not all CLASP activities are feasible or appropriate for citywide implementation. Some special projects require so much preparation time that they can only be done with additional staff. Other activities are specifically designed for special populations that reside in particular communities of the city.

For example in northern Manhattan, where 85% of the students speak Spanish, CLASP staff was concerned not only about reaching students but also bridging the generation and language gap between children mastering English and parents fluent in Spanish and who were not attempting to learn English. Bilingual picture books and titles available both Spanish and English provided the opportunity for "in tandem reading aloud." One librarian reads a page in Spanish and then a second librarian reads the same page in English. As the two librarians alternate, students enjoy the story in a language comfortable to them. This also allows them to learn new vocabulary. CLASP staff modeled this technique for parents so they could share books in this fashion with their children as a way of providing simultaneous English and Spanish lessons.

Older children who are reading below grade level are trained by CLASP librarians in reading aloud techniques and then scheduled to share stories with small groups of younger children. At the beginning of this program, children's librarians from the public library selected a group of titles. As the older students develop evaluative skills, they begin to find other good books for sharing independently. At the end of the term an awards ceremony provides a certificate of achievement and recognition. It is often the first time reading and success have been linked for these students.

The joint meetings of school and public librarians that initially began in the South Bronx had two major goals; to bring public and school librarians together within the same neighborhood and second to provide professional networking for the school librarians. The biggest difficulty in holding these meetings was arranging the release of school librarians during the school day. Working with administrators in the community school districts allowed NYPL to select dates to maximize attendance. Programs attracting the largest audience have been appearances by authors and/or illustrators of children's books, internet and/or technology training, and book talks by children's and young adult librarians.

Although many activities provided support for school librarians, curriculum needs and student achievement, NYPL never lost sight of its primary goal: to bring children to their local public libraries. One successful program to achieve this was designed with the cooperation of school librarians and CLASP staff. The "Passport Project" provided an incentive for visits to a neighborhood library. School librarians distributed the "Passports to Reading", to every third grade student. For each visit to a local library, one page of the passport was stamped by the children's librarian. After the sixth visit the student took the passport back to the school librarian who awarded a book as a prize. Enthusiasm for the project extended to the lower grades and second graders could hardly wait for the chance to get a passport and join the fun.

CLASP designed the “Stump the Librarian” contest to entice the reluctant middle school age group to get excited about the local library. The original concept for Stump the Librarian was pioneered in the Bay Area Youth-At-Risk Project from the west coast. The idea was to tap the “know-it-all” attitude of teens, while allowing them to challenge the knowledge of adults. Local public librarians schedule a date to bring a few ready reference resources to the school library and get set up. They then challenge the students to ask a question for which the librarians cannot find the answer. Prizes are awarded, but the prize ticket must be redeemed back at the local library. Preparation requires collaboration between local public librarians, school librarians and a school’s faculty. Students become very enthralled with the possibility of stumping the librarians, and they have to do research to formulate good questions. Teachers learn what can or what cannot be answered in a library inquiry. What is a good question?

Replication Possibilities for CLASP

The private grant funding CLASP ended in 1994. Because of the enthusiastic support from the participants, plans were developed to phase CLASP into all NYC community school districts. Through an initiative of the New York City Council, CLASP funding continued uninterrupted in the NYPL pilot districts. Queens Borough Public Library and Brooklyn Public Library then each established one CLASP district. These five districts were the first phase of a citywide implementation of the CLASP Project. In Germany, the Bertelsmann Foundation was also interested in establishing “Public Libraries and Schools – New Forms of Partnerships.” After hearing about the CLASP success in NYC, they launched a five-year project in six cities throughout Germany.

Bringing CLASP to Your Community

A large private grant does provide an opportunity to demonstrate an effective collaborative program, but school and public librarians should not wait to begin cooperative endeavors. Many successful CLASP activities were developed with skills that librarians already have. Budget allocations may be small or non-existent and yet working together may be effective. Book talking was used with teachers and students. Storytelling was modeled for parents as an introduction to literacy. Reading aloud was expanded to books in other languages. Professional development programs sponsored by the NYC Department of Education began to include tri-library and school personnel regularly.

CLASP identified three levels of partnership: communication, cooperation, and collaboration. Communication can be as simple as knowing the names, phone numbers, fax numbers, and email addresses of the staff in local school libraries and public libraries. Cooperation expands services as each library type maintains program control while inviting participation from other library types, school and public. Collaboration requires each library to be solidly committed in order to support the next level of collaboration. Effective joint efforts require consistent, sustained communication as a prerequisite to cooperative activities. All of this will inevitably lead to successful collaborative endeavors.

In your community your first steps toward partnership might be to catalog the things that you already do cooperatively. You may already mail program announcements to each other. You may already schedule annual events that require shared space. You may already use class visits as a time to prepare packets of information for teachers to take back to the school community. You will probably be surprised to find how much there is already connecting your organizations together. Review these activities to determine if a minor change would expand the scope and outreach potential of your activities. You might want to share the cost of subscriptions of professional journals that each organization buys annually and network the table of contents page from each issue received.

One key element in effective communication is maintaining continuity. When there is a change of personnel, learn the names of new staff members and introduce new staff in your organization to all involved in cooperative efforts. Your first cooperative venture might be an Open House or Teacher Workshop. Plan ahead. Develop a budget, include the items you can easily afford, keep it simple, look for free materials, and create bibliographies or other lists of important information. Inexpensive reading incentives are always a big hit: “Read” posters, bookmarks, and pencils. Keep refreshments light and manageable. It is surprising how much can be done with very little finance and a lot of flexibility and creativity.

Keep your expectations reasonable as you implement a first project. Establish trust by following through, planning ahead, and organizing well. Always anticipate issues and concerns in advance, clearly define responsibilities and deadlines where necessary, and certainly follow the plan that was agreed upon. Schedule a time to review and evaluate after the project is completed. Don't forget it is possible to learn for misadventures as well as successful ventures.

If you feel ready for a large undertaking like "Passport to Reading" or "Stump the Librarians", give yourself extra time for planning. A new project may require official approval, and time should be included for answering questions and making adjustments if necessary for both cooperating library types. Be sure to tell everyone about the new collaborative project; publicity is needed for success. You may be the best advertisement for the new project by sharing your excitement and enthusiasm.

A Lesson from CLASP

CLASP began at New York Public Library with three broad goals. Before there was an online public access catalog or access to the Internet in every branch, the lack of technology required the development of connections that were more personal. Librarians visited schools to invite children and teachers into the local public library. In the 21st century - the days of OPACs, CD-ROMs and email - there are significantly more ways to communicate and work cooperatively. This enhances but does not eclipse the success of CLASP in connecting people – librarians, students, parents and educators – to create an environment that supports, student achievement and life-long learning in school, at home and at the local public library.

CLASP Timeline

1990–1991	CLASP Pilot Project established NYPL (Manhattan, Bronx, and Staten Island) Planning Year
1991-1993	NYPL's Three Year Successful Pilot Includes 23 NYPL branches, 4,465 programs, 120,875 students, teachers and parents served.
1993-1994	NY's City Council receives proposal to fund CLASP Citywide, Queens Borough Public & Brooklyn Public Libraries received partial funding for CLASP 23,903 students served.
1995-1999	QBPL, NYPL, BPL receive increased funding, additional community school districts are added to CLASP service areas.
2000-2001	CLASP is fully funded by NY's City Council for all 36 Community School Districts, Citywide participation, 1,200 hundred schools, additional 286, 456 students, parents and teachers served.
2001-2002	NYC budgets drastically reduce services as result of September 11th, World Trade Center terrorists attack.
2002-2003	CLASP Offices begin to close, service is transferred to public library's local branch staff.
2003	NYPL is conducting a study, seeking to reinstate CLASP

CLASP Facts at a Glance

Total	# of Residents New York City	8,000,000
Total	# of Students New York City Schools	1,087,255
Total	# of English Language Learners	134,103
Total	# Community School Districts	36
Total	Annual Budget Dept. of Education	\$ 12.2 Billion
Total	Annual Allocation Per Student	\$11,220
Total	# Pedagogues (Teachers & Librarians)	91,620

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (Founded 1842) 1,200 Schools

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY (Founded 1895)

(Manhattan, Bronx, Staten Island) 85 Branches
Total # CLASP New Library Card Registrations 42,742
(Children, Teens, Adults)

BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY (Founded 1896)

60 Branches
Total # CLASP New Library Card Registrations 8,954
(Children, Teens, Adults)

QUEENS BOROUGH PUBLIC LIBRARY (Founded 1897)

63 Branches
Total # CLASP New Library Card Registrations 11,459
(Children, Teens, Adults)
Total# CLASP PROGRAMS 1991- 2002 15,897
(Reaching Children, Teachers and Parents)

MAJOR LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY NYC STUDENTS

English	Korean	Urdu
Spanish	Chinese	Arabic
Haitian Creole	Russian	Bengal

Biographical Note

Ms. Sandra Kennedy Bright is a native New Yorker who is a product of the New York City school system. She is currently the Director of the Office of School Library Services of the Division of Instructional Support for the New York City Department of Education, working with over one thousand school libraries that support New York State Learning Standards for 1.2 million students in the city's public schools. Ms. Bright, who is a member of the 2003 Caldecott Committee, was recently a member of the NYS Commission on Library Services for the 21st Century. Ms. Bright has been an adjunct instructor for the Graduate Library Programs of Pratt Institute, Palmer Library School of Long Island University, and Queens College of the City University of New York. Her library career has exemplified multi-type library cooperation.